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HOPE IN SUFFERING

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DIARY OF A FRENCH ARMY CHAPLAIN

By ABBÉ FÉLIX KLEIN

American Hospital, Neuilly, Paris

Translated from "La Guerre vue d'une Ambulance"
By M. HARRIET M. CAPES

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Hope in Suffering

Memories and Reflections of a French Army Chaplain

By

ABBÉ FÉLIX KLEIN

American Hospital, Neuilly, Paris

Author of "The Diary of a French Army Chaplain," etc.

SECOND EDITION

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GEMMA BAILEY

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In Memory
of my friend
Frank Tyrrell,
and those British Soldiers
who have fallen in France
for the common cause

INTRODUCTION

By Dr. H. Scott Holland

The Abbé Klein is a good friend to us in England. Every one has, I hope, read the book that won our hearts, as it told with frank and irresistible simplicity his experiences in a military hospital during the tension of those terrible months at the beginning of the war.

Now he has written to tell us a little more; and what he now tells with the same delightful simplicity is more directly personal and intimate than before. He is not afraid to let us see how he deals not only with the wounded or dying soldiers, but also with the suffering souls who come to him in their moments of loss and agony. He lets us hear his words as he speaks them; and as we listen, we recognize the reality of St. Paul's great cry: "There is neither Greek nor Jew

. . . Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all." For it is the one Voice of the one Faith that is uttering itself through the lips of this devoted French priest. It is the voice of Christ Jesus Himself, Who has made us all to become one man. There is neither Latin nor Teuton, neither French nor English; but Christ is all in all. Christ is our religion. In Him we all talk one language, and we all understand one another. The barriers are down. We say the same thing; we hold by the same cord; we possess the same secret; we live and die in the same hope. In our hours of stress and strain there is but one word that avails and but one promise that stands sure: "It is I; be not afraid." In whatever tongue, that is the only message that one man can pass to another when all else has gone.

And yet all the time that one reads these tender and loving records, the counter-

truth is whispered in one's ear: "There is in Christ both Latin and Teuton, French and English." For how is it possible to be more utterly French than in the pages of this little book? Is it not characteristically racial from end to end? Is not every syllable alive with a certain distinctive note of which no Englishman would ever be capable; and is it not precisely this which gives to it its special charm? The native element is intensified by lending itself to become the vehicle of a universal verity.

Everything that is individual, distinct, human, and personal, feels the quickening power of the one Spirit. Just because there is no prerogative of one race above another, just because the one Christ knows no distinction of blood, therefore each separate people and tribe is free to speak in its own private tongue the wonderful works of God. And therefore, to our delight, this priest of France speaks home

to us English by virtue of being exactly what he is. We could never think of saying it as he says it; but the common truth is made fresh and new to us by taking a form so utterly different from our own. And so we welcome with special keenness one more tribute to the sympathy which is now drawing together those two countries which gain most by fraternal exchange. The Abbé has shown us how Christ can vitalize both the unity that binds and the difference that balances.

Yet there remains one notable difference between the mind of France and that of England, which we cannot but feel as we read these pages. France has a far more deliberate and conscious recognition of the reality of Sacrifice than is possible for us in our island home. It is true that our traditional sense of security has been rudely shaken by Zeppelin raids: we know a little of the horror of war when it falls on our own cities and homesteads.

But the experience of France is of another order. She has tasted the full bitterness of invasion. The memory of 1870 has eaten into her life. And now there is the grip of the foe upon her fairest vineyards and on her rich and populous industries. It is as if Northumberland and Durham were ground down under the heel of the invader. And there have been hideous butcheries of innocent citizens in town and country, and wrecked villages, and shattered shrines, and outraged women, and murdered children. And therefore the Frenchman sets himself to the dread work before him with clear eyes and a purged will. There is no limit to the sacrifice that may be demanded of him; nor has he any reserves to make. He gives all. He surrenders everything. He has but one clear call —to fight to the death to free France from the foe. He must go, under this overmastering necessity. "My man must

leave me," said the Frenchwoman, "for I am only his wife: but France is his mother. Let him go and die for her!"

It is hardly possible for us in England to have fastened on this relentless logic of self-sacrifice with such unflinching actuality. We know that we are, as a fact, fighting for our national existence; but that is still far off from sight and touch, for it is over the sea; and England itself is about us, safe and free. But this intense recognition of the sacrifice asked, in living terms of flesh and blood, grasped with the precision of a Latin consciousness, has given to the resistance of France a moral dignity, a spiritual force, which stands alone in the war. And it is expressed, with the power and the eloquence of intense reality, in the chapter devoted to this subject in the present book.

Let me close by quoting the noble words

in which the Abbé gives expression to the very soul of France—

" Whether zealous in the faith or unbelievers moved unconsciously by grace from on high, it is through the love of the Good, through the love of God, that they have all offered themselves. Good does not lead to Evil, to nothingness ; and God does not betray those who give themselves for Him. The height of perfection which they attain at the moment of their sacrifice, far from vanishing in one bright flash, is perpetuated in eternity. Lifted suddenly and easily above the material world, they no longer have to fear danger and contamination, they see their destiny fixed at the point to which it was carried by a wonderful impulse : in the possession, the perfect enjoyment, of infinite Light and Love.

" Nor is it to them alone that their noble death discloses sources of life eternal. As it is the cause of their greatness and

their happiness, so it is of ours. It has not only saved for us our earthly country and possessions, but our ideal itself. As they are lifted to such heights before our eager sight they reveal to us, freed from all obscurity, the end which we also must pursue. And the great law of sacrifice which we were beginning to forget finds again its splendour, its divine attraction in the radiant example of their sacrifice."

M. Sabatier has told us how this temper of heroic devotion inspires French men and women, even in its naked ideality, with no vital Creed to support and reinforce it. The Abbé shows us all the power and beauty that pass into it when it receives its consummation through the Cross of Christ and the living Faith of the Catholic Church.

H. S. HOLLAND.

CHRIST CHURCH,
OXFORD,
March 28, 1916.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In October, 1915, one of my friends wrote to me about the very kind welcome which my last book, the *Diary of a French Army Chaplain, la Guerre vue d'une Ambulance*, had met with in England. My friend went on to ask me if I was thinking of writing anything more on the war. "Something might very usefully be written," he added, "on the question of the war and the love of God. It is a question which still troubles many people in England, partly because, I think, there is sometimes some exaggeration in the utterances of good folk who talk as if the war were altogether a blessing!"

This was the suggestion which called forth this little book, and must be its excuse.

Further encouragement, too, has come to me in the Introduction, a fresh proof of the very generous recognition I have met with in England, and I am very grateful to the distinguished son of Oxford who has written it. These very needs of the soul which my friend told me of in England I had noticed many times in France. Our two countries are not only agreed in this war in the pursuit of the same ideal, in undertaking the same sacrifices and the same labours; they share the same emotions, the same sorrows, anxieties and hopes. In France as in England, and in many other countries too, there are countless hearts that must be comforted for the loss of those near to them,—countless minds that are disturbed in their religious and moral faith before such a flood of evils, and before the darkness which seems to wrap in greater obscurity than ever God's designs alike for the destiny of individuals and for the common fate of humanity. These needs and difficulties were only too

well known to me; I was too closely in touch, in a big military hospital, with the most tragic consequences of the war not to come across problems of this kind almost every day. And so it has only taken me three months to write the following pages. I have only had to put down, during this brief period, a few of the scenes which passed before my eyes and a few of the reflections which crossed my mind spontaneously or were suggested by the questions put to me.[1] I reproduce them here in the simple form and the chance order in which they came to me in experience. This is not the time for literary refinements. This little book will be all that I want if it strengthens the shaken faith of one single soul, if it brings comfort to the heart of one wife who has lost her husband, one mother who has lost her son.

FÉLIX KLEIN.

[1] While the book has been in the press, I added some pages written at other times.

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PART I

MEMORIES

THE BLIND PRIEST

I

THE BLIND PRIEST

October 19, 1915.—We have had here for about ten days a young sergeant, a priest, who was terribly wounded in the face in Champagne. He still can only take liquid food, and even that with difficulty. He has not, so far, recovered his sight, and the future is still uncertain.

November 10.—His left eye had to be removed yesterday, for it had been poisoned by a big splinter of shell which could not be extracted. The condition of the other eye, and even of the brain, was getting alarming. The patient, brave enough but rather rough and outspoken (he had spent more time in the Army than in his seminary), did not fail to tell us, in somewhat picturesque language, that he was

beginning to get impatient; and every one understood, for his was a peculiarly trying case. Only his pious sister, a nurse in a provincial hospital who had been allowed to come and spend every day with him sometimes seemed distressed. Good child, how she loved her brother! They were twins. But she was terrified of hurting him. Though the doctor asked her, she could not bring herself to tell him of the operation he was to undergo. I took it on myself to do so, and he acquiesced at once with a *fiat* full of submission.

The removal of the eye has much improved his general condition, and now he is perfectly quiet, though we do not know what will happen to the other eye, which has also been attacked by traumatic cataract. For the rest, the wounds in his jaw are still very painful and prevent him from making his Communion, which he misses very much. He cannot even receive a morsel of the Host.

He is still growing in patience, especially since the precious favour granted him this morning. As I was carrying the Blessed Sacrament in another ward the inspiration came to me to pass by his.

"Friend," I said to him, "your chaplain is here. I am bearing our Lord with me. He wished to come and bless you Himself."

If you had seen the emotion that filled him at these words, his humble joy, his gratitude! In spite of all there are beautiful gleams of light in the night which envelops us.

November 25.—The temptation to impatience is returning. My friend recognizes that every care is being taken of him; but he thinks that things are being slow, and that nobody tells him anything. And it is difficult to explain to him that the doctor hesitates to answer his questions just because he sees

the chances of complete recovery growing less.

"But one must know something, and I have the right to be told—Oh, if I had always to be blind!"

But he quickly dismisses the idea, too quickly for my mind, and I do not like his hopes to be encouraged. I am trying to prepare him, sometimes seriously, sometimes by joking paradoxes, for he likes this kind of humour.

"Our Lord would not like to play me such a trick! I'm sure He would not!"

And I, laughing, in answer, "He certainly would not dare! The cross, it's all very well for Him, for His mother, and His chosen saints; but with people like us, I expect He would be very careful."

"Then you think I would submit all right?"

"Oh, no! Bow to God's will; that's all very well for laymen—but for a priest!"

"Tell, me, are you trying to prepare me? You know something?"

"Honestly, no—I know nothing. I hope you will recover your sight, and with you I pray God for it; but if some day I hear the opposite, this time I am speaking seriously, I know that He will strengthen you to submit."

And I went on to talk of other things.

December 4.—Though the patient does not know it, the little chance he has is growing still less. Happily, for several days he has been able to receive the Blessed Sacrament. Even this great grace is hardly enough for the struggle against impatience and nervousness. I love such characters, generous and hard to control; I love goodness that costs. My priest is full of faith in the supernatural, to such an extent that it is rather alarming in a way to see how firmly he expects a miracle which will perhaps not be thought good for

him; but his natural eagerness, vitality, and love of action is not stifled for all that. I do not see that he is very well prepared for the restricted life of a blind man, but he ought to be, and indeed was, a good soldier and a good sergeant.

He had a visit this afternoon from another sergeant in the platoon, on six days' leave; a Parisian, sobered by what he has seen this year and a half. He was deeply moved at the sight of his comrade with bandaged eyes and disfigured face. But he mastered his feelings, and after introducing his wife, who had come with him, he quietly asked for the news. A conversation then began which is worth recording.

"You see," said the blind man, "at what cost I got off. But what happened to you after our platoon lost touch?"

"I was with you; that is to say, four or five hundred yards in front of the company, the bulk of which advanced to the

wood on the right, only I couldn't get clear of the barbed wire and escape the machine guns which began to pepper us. I had to lie down in a sort of trench which I enlarged with my entrenching tool. There were four of us. It wasn't much fun. Poor P., our cook, who lifted his head for a moment, was killed outright."

"Then you stayed there the whole day?"

"Yes, and we went back at night at the same time as the others. But what happened to you?"

"Our lot was in front with the lieutenant and the sergeant-major. When we saw that the fire from the machine guns was too hot we sheltered in some big 'marmite'[1] holes which luckily were there; otherwise no one would have got back. Even so the lieutenant was killed by a shell in one of the holes, and the soldiers

[1] The French slang equivalent for "Jack Johnsons."

round him were killed, too, or wounded. At one moment a man came out of the wood on our flank. The sergeant-major made out with his glasses that he was a German. It was not easy to see clearly yet; it was about half-past seven, and still rather misty. The sergeant-major ordered us to fire. As no one stirred I took my rifle and knocked him over at the second shot. Then a whole patrol came into the open and made for us. Another order from the sergeant-major. As before, it was I that fired, but at that very moment I got some splinters of shell full in my face."

"You wouldn't have got wounded if you had kept down like the others."

"Of course I wouldn't. But all the same it drove off the German patrol. Well, blood flowed from my mouth, nose and everywhere, and I lay down to die. But I soon saw that my time hadn't come. I waited all day with the others and made off that evening, with the help of a friend,

as quickly as my weakness would let me. I fainted twice before reaching the French lines at about eight o'clock. With the help of the Red Cross orderlies I dragged myself to the dressing-station, and they took me from there to the divisional hospital. But what happened to you ? Were you in the conquered trench all night ? "

" A dreadful night ! Constantly on the alert and ready to fire."

" And next day ? "

" Next day, at about five o'clock in the morning, the Boches made a counter-attack with bombs. Fortunately we had machine guns or we should have had to abandon our positions. The counter-attack was very murderous."

" What happened in the end ? "

" Out of the 2,000 men in the regiment, 1,300 were killed or wounded."

" Impossible ! "

" Yes, they were. The colonel at the head of the list and nearly all the captains."

"Which?"

"Ours, to begin with; one of our sergeants saw his pocket-book blown to bits," and he mentioned several names. "Of our battalion only Captain —— escaped."

"And my friend, the sergeant-major who was my server at Mass?"

"Lost, too."

"What a dreadful thing! His wife and three children. . . . And ——?"

"He didn't get a scratch."

"Oh, good."

"Then there was the quartermaster-sergeant, poor ——; and our second lieutenant was shot in the head."

"Yes, that I did know. He was dying that evening when I went in to the dressing-station. I had confessed him two days before. Poor X., he was such a nice fellow."

The name made me start. I knew the lieutenant and his family. In spite of myself I interrupted their talk.

"I am so glad," I said, "that you were able to give him absolution two days before his death."

"I absolved him that very morning again, with the whole company."

"How was that?" I asked.

"In the morning at about six o'clock, before we left the trenches to begin the attack, I asked the lieutenant if he had any objection to my giving absolution to the company. With his permission I climbed up on to the parapet and, walking the whole length of the trench, I pronounced the absolution four times, once for each platoon. The noise of the guns was so deafening that I could not have made myself heard by every one at once, and I wanted to tell the men what I was going to do."

"What did you say to them?"

"I don't quite know now. Something like this: 'Friends, you know as well as I that this is a critical moment. Remember that

you are not only brave French soldiers, but also brave children of the good God. You have all been baptized, you have made your first Communion, and you wish, if your time comes, to die like good Christians. From the bottom of your hearts ask God's forgiveness for your sins. Make the sign of the Cross with me. I am going to give you absolution.' Then, holding my rifle at the order, with fixed bayonet, in my left hand, I made the sign of the Cross with my right hand and pronounced the words of absolution. As far as I could tell they all made the sign of the Cross and received pardon. When I got down into the trench again many hands were stretched out to grasp mine. If there had been any rifle fire just then I could not have done what I did, but we were in the second line of attack; the first had moved out a quarter of an hour before. We were only under occasional bursts of gun-fire."

December 12.—His sister has come to me with the terrible news:

"He will never see again—the doctor has said so. What will become of us? I can see his despair. Do help us!"

"I will, my child; and above all, God will help us. We will pray to Him so earnestly."

"God's will be done. But why has He not granted our prayers?"

"Because He had a better gift for us than what we were asking; light for the soul instead of light for the body, holiness instead of physical sight. Pray now that your brother may bear his trial well. Such prayers are always answered."

I went to see the nurses and then the doctor. There is no longer any doubt: we shall face the situation to-morrow in all its bearings, physical and moral; and the day after I shall have our poor friend brought to my room.

December 14.—I had some wakeful hours last night, during which I was thinking over what I ought to say again and again. When the moment came I said a prayer and forgot all the sentences I had prepared.

At ten o'clock this morning they came into my room. My eyes met those of the poor sister, who led him by the hand, and tears choked our utterance. I signed to her to go and pray before the Blessed Sacrament and sat the blind man down beside me. How I told him I don't know now. But it was soon over. I prepared him less by anything I said than by the feeling and deepened sympathy in my voice and the clasp of my hand. Our talk began more or less like this—

"Well, how are things to-day?"

"My eye is still painful," he said, "but I think that it is getting better."

"You think . . ."

"Yes . . . why . . . have you seen the doctor again?"

"Yes."

And then a silence, during which I put my crucifix in his hands, the great copper cross of Foreign Missions. Then, sharply and quickly, like a surgeon's knife, the truth pierced into his soul, his great trouble was told him. Never again would he see the light of the sun, never again see his friends; he would always be enveloped in darkness.

Though I had no doubt of his final resignation, I was expecting some outburst of revolt at first. But there was none; only, beneath his breath, some exclamations of anguish. And soon the valiant disciple of Christ said, like his Master, "My God, Thy will be done." He had drunk the cup of bitterness at one draught. Oh, the depths of heroism hidden by God in the human soul! How He can stir them, at great moments, through the influence of His grace, and of suffering!

And now the blind man was thanking me; and I was overcome with admiration, seeing him in a moment risen so greatly in goodness, and would have knelt down before him had I not been afraid of spoiling the splendid simplicity of his conduct. Still I felt I had to tell him what I thought.

"Friend, what you have just done is worth a lifetime of active work. Had you only lived for this one act of resignation your destiny would be great and glorious. But, believe me, you are assuredly not condemned to a life of inaction. A very fruitful field of service is open to you; you can preach, confess, direct men's souls with all the more influence and authority just because of your affliction. And, above all, you will still be able to say Mass, and that will be enough to make your life a rich one. I will help you at first, soon, when your mouth is healed. For you will still stay with us, the doctors have said so. . . ."

And the conversation became quieter, more ordinary; we were on earth again. Suddenly his strained nerves brought a reaction; tears and sobs mingled with prayers and words of resignation. I was silent, clasping his hands in mine and giving him the crucifix to hold. When he had grown calmer I gave him a prayer of the Abbé Perreyve which had just been sent me, and before I left it with him we said it aloud together. It may help other Christians in times of trial, so I give it here in full.

> "The hour of distress has come, O Lord, and my soul could not bear the burden. Then I saw Thy image, O Christ Jesus; the instinct for safety drew me to it; with trembling hands I grasped it, and my face, bathed in tears, was bowed over it. It is well to weep over Thine image, O Crucified Saviour; the tears of men recognize

it. Human sufferings are linked to the Cross by an everlasting bond of likeness. Through my tears I gazed at Thy hands, pierced for the love of men; my lips touched the nails that transfixed Thy feet; and my hand which grasped Thy image rested on Thy wounded heart. What did I say? What did I hear? I could not tell it even to myself. I stayed long in communion with Thee, kissing Thy wounds, pressing in my hands Thy thorn-encrowned head, lost in the vision of Thy Cross. Long did my tears bathe the Cross that Thou didst bathe with Thy blood. I could not speak, but in the bottom of my heart lay the words that Thou, O Jesus, saidest at Thy last moment: 'Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit.' Long, and in depths unknown, I followed the echo of the words in the recesses of my soul.

Then peace came to me. I seemed to sleep upon Thy breast, and little by little love vanquished suffering. O Cross of Jesus, supreme consolation, never will I forget thy strength before the rising flood of despair, nor thy power to change burning tears to peace and gentleness."

"Now," I said, when we had finished this prayer, "I will go and fetch your sister."

"She was not here, then?"

"No, she was on her knees before the Blessed Sacrament, and her prayers have helped us."

I went into the gallery which overlooks the chapel and signed to her to come back. When she came in and I was able to answer her anxious questioning looks with, "He has been perfect. God is well pleased!" her face lit with divine joy, and she embraced her brother with as much

awe as love. Then we three talked of their prospects and plans for the future with a quiet simplicity that I should never have thought possible. It was indeed that heavenly repose of the soul after strife, described so truly by the same Abbé Perreyve in his *Meditations on the Way of the Cross*, when he puts these words in our Saviour's mouth—

"Souls that I have often tried by great troubles know that after the first shock, when there is nothing but to hold fast by faith and to trust blindly to My guidance, there comes soon a time of calm during which there is left to the faithful soul only the recollection of the fight, with an exquisite and refreshing peace. Then all is quiet, all is repose in spirit and in body; spectres vanish, anguish disappears, the heart is free and astonished at the sudden return of this joyful peace which it no longer hoped for."

This peace has never again left my two

dear friends—for now I love them with a lasting affection. And their serenity has struck every one. Some one who saw them in the chapel, where they went when they left me, told me afterwards that he had never seen such prayer and adoration. Yesterday evening and this afternoon when I visited them I found the soldiers in their ward full of admiration, and the nurse told me that no sermon she had ever heard had been so wonderful. I myself was overjoyed, in spite of the confidence that his eager, one might even say vehement, nature had always inspired in me. I offered the Holy Sacrifice for him this morning and he made his Communion. If liturgically I could have done so I would have said the Mass of Thanksgiving.

THE DEATH OF MY FRIEND

II

THE DEATH OF MY FRIEND

October 20.—The sufferings of the wounded are not greater, they are often less, than the terrible anxiety of their families. I knew this before from seeing it in others; now I know it by my own personal experience.

Of all my friends at the front there is one whose fate touches me most nearly; he is the husband of a wife worthy of him, whom I myself had given to him, and has four delightful children—and I have just heard that he was wounded a fortnight ago. And all that his wife has been able to hear, in spite of most persistent efforts, is that he was buried by the explosion of a shell, was dug out with great difficulty by one of his companions and was removed to one of the field hospitals.

I know that the hospitals at the front are overflowing and that it is the wounded who have to be considered first, the wounded who are brought in ceaselessly in days such as these, and who must be dressed, operated on, transferred to other hospitals, or buried. . . . But if they could only, as far as it is possible, think of the relations, the mothers and wives who are killing themselves with anxiety as they wait for news!

October 23 (*night*).—I have been incapable, these two days, of recording our vain and anxious inquiries. To-night I can write. If I am interrupted it will not be by sleep. News which we were longing for so much has come. The family and friends were becoming increasingly anxious, but his young wife, who was told again and again that the silence was normal and due to removal to a distant hospital, was actually growing in confidence.

Yesterday the doctor friend who was visiting the field hospitals for us at last found the one to which he had been taken and where he had died on the twelfth of October. His wife's parents heard it yesterday and sent me an express message at once, which I got this morning: "We are leaving her to sleep to-night," they added after telling the news, "and we will tell her the truth to-morrow. There is no human consolation for her. Bring her spiritual comfort."

She heard it this morning when she woke. An hour later I was with her. . . . And to think that there are thousands of families in like case! Thousands of children who have lost their father, of mothers who have lost their son, of young wives who have lost their husband!

"Oh, abbé," she said to me, after we had let our grief take its course in silence together, "it was you who gave him to

me. Was it for such a little while—so short a life?"

"No, my child, it was for ever. He is yours and you are his for the life that has no ending."

"I know; I believe. He lives with God—and near me, is he not?"

"Yes, he is nearer to you, more loving, more perfect than you have ever known him."

"Yes, I will be strong . . . O God, I submit . . ."

"That is right, be worthy of him. You both said when you parted: 'We cannot give more, we will give it cheerfully.'"

"Yes, and I say so still. But let me cry first, afterwards I shall be strong."

"You are strong now, and you will be in the future. God will help you for the sake of the children."

"Oh, my children! They know nothing! I must tell them. They wrote to him yesterday, and he was already dead!

He is dead! Oh, how bitter it is! God grant that this suffering may not be in vain!"

"No, it will not be in vain for him, for them, or for the world."

"Nor for those whom we still have at the front, will it? My sister, your son will be kept safe for you. And it will help to prevent war in the future, to make this the very last of all wars. . . . My poor children, they have no father now—and I no husband! He is lying under the ground! Oh, it is too terrible!"

"It is not his real self that is buried; he is with God and close to you."

"I know; but you understand what I am feeling."

"Yes, my child, and God, too, understands your grief; to submit does not prevent one from sorrowing."

"I suffer and submit myself. . . ."

We fell into silence again, silence broken by sobs. As her grief grew more crushing

her parents and I tried to distract her mind by going back over the few details we had gathered and on which we based our slight conjectures. She insisted that we must get to know more, see those who had seen him, pray over his grave, reconstruct his last two weeks.

"Till then he wrote to me about everything, every day, every hour."

"What a precious possession the letters will be for you and the children!"

"My poor children—my poor children. What will become of them?"

"Their father will not cease to watch over them and protect them. Because he is now united to God he cannot be less fond of them, less good, less able to help them. And then they will have all of us: your parents, the friends who love you and them."

"Yes, you are all so good to us!"

"And above all they will have you, you who will live for them and who will

keep alive for them, as the great motive for goodness, the thought of what their father was. You are quite right in wishing to tell them the news yourself."

"It is indeed my right and my duty. God will tell me what to say to them."

"Assuredly He will. And this moment, which may decide the whole course of their lives, will be as wonderful as it will be full of grief. I think it would be best to kneel down at the end and say the Lord's Prayer with them. 'Our Father Who art in heaven—Thy will be done—Give us this day our daily bread—Deliver us from evil——' *Our Father Who art in heaven*, it is doubly true for them now: of God and of the father who has gone to Him, whom they will meet again with Him."

Relations and friends came, the dearest and the closest. Tears were shed and a few affectionate words spoken. Some-

times we gave rein to our grief, sometimes we tried to quiet it by imagining the unknown circumstances of his death. Then I went back to my hospital, unwilling, though a kind colleague had taken my place, to be away from it too long. Never had so many wounded nor such bad cases been sent to it as after this glorious but bloody offensive in Champagne. At this moment there are no less than three in the mortuary.

I had to see the brother of one of them who is to be buried to-morrow, and the mother of another who died to-night. Poor woman! she is even more to be pitied than our young friend. She, too, is a widow, having lost her husband two years ago, and had only this one child, the son who has just died. If Jesus, Who gave her son back to the widow of Nain without waiting for her to ask Him, has not saved this boy in spite of our prayers, it is because He knows what increase of grace

and joy for all eternity their suffering will bring to the mother and her son; what source of regeneration for their country and for mankind. "Such suffering cannot be in vain."

I went through our wards this afternoon, hard though it was—how hard I did not try to hide from the patients who knew me well. With the others I attempted to smile. They only remarked that I looked tired. Yes, I was indeed; and with difficulty I forced back my tears when I thought that my friend might have been in their place and looked after like them. And when I saw, at the visiting hour, a young wife at her husband's bedside, and sometimes with a child, I went by unable to speak. I remembered too well what the poor young widow had said to me at the time of the great attack in which she knew he was taking part: "If only he comes back to me, wounded or maimed, I shall be content. To care for

him, devote myself to him, look after him!" And I who know how well he would have endured pain, what would I not have given for him to have been one of our patients! The moment I heard he was wounded I wrote to get him transferred to us; I wrote to him himself to ask for this. Oh, if he could be there in one of those white beds! If she could sit there, holding his hand! If I could bring to him there, with my finger on my lip, his daughters and his son whom he brought up so well, and who loved him so dearly!

I went back this evening to see the poor child. I found her at once calmer and more broken, gentle and aching all over as our wounded are after they have lost a limb. She had seen friends; she had her dear parents with her.

"I will say Mass for him and for you to-morrow," I said to her when I went away. "If you are not too tired come and make your Communion. It will make

him happy. He will have you nearer to him in God where he is, and where you can always find him."

October 25, 1915.—Friends are writing to comfort me. I am deeply touched to see how they appreciated him, and how they had realized my great affection for him.

"You are weeping for him," said a friend to me, herself in mourning for a son-in-law who was a true son to her, also a friend of mine and father of a young child, "You are weeping for him as Jesus wept over Lazarus. You, too, will have the joy of aiding his resurrection in the souls of the four little children so dear to you. What a splendid office for his friend! Strengthen yourself for the task. Let us stand together and not lose confidence. The future will depend upon these children, our true hope, and upon the ideas we implant in them."

Another friend, a priest, wrote to me the very first moment, and, not knowing if the young widow had been told, asked me on his behalf to tell her how deeply he entered into her sorrow. "And yet," he added, "there is room, too, for other feelings than grief. Our Lord, Who set charity above all else, counted death for the sake of others the crowning point of charity. Such a death was His own great act, and they are indeed privileged whom He joins to Himself in His death for us all. M.'s zeal in pursuing the ideal of a Christian family made him worthy of this. He and Mme. M. have given this proof, the greatest they could give, of their love of God. It is with this thought that they were ready for the sacrifice; on this understanding God accepted it; and it is their dear children who will win from it an abundant reward."

I sent the letter on to her at once, adding these few lines:

" God Himself speaks to you, my child, in His great language of sacrifice, of deepest suffering, of faith that overcomes all, of the perfect act of love which makes you say: 'Not I, O God, but Thou, my husband, my children, my friends and all mankind! For Thy sake, and for theirs, I resign myself.'

" Our intelligence is too small to understand the great designs of God. Still I think I can see one quite clearly: that He has led your soul, during these last fifteen years, to the fullest perfection you could attain by happy paths, and now He wishes to complete your progress along the paths of suffering. Here, as before, you will trustfully submit yourself to the guidance of your heavenly Father. You already feel, and will understand more and more, the stern beauty that lies here. Here you find the example of the crucified Jesus and of our Lady of Sorrows who saw her Son die while she lived on. Here,

also, you will find help from your parents, your brothers and your sisters, your faithful friends; here you will find me, too, beside you as long as I live."

Do not be surprised that I appealed to such lofty feelings. They are not more exalted, far from it, than those expressed in the letters of my friend and his young wife. As she does not withhold her permission from anything so long as there is a chance of doing good, I will quote some passages in their correspondence which I have been reading over again to bring myself some comfort.

Mme M. wrote to me at the end of June, 1915:

"I must just tell you that L. has started for the region of Arras. I got his address yesterday. I must be patient and quiet; but it is hard, and the burden is heavy to bear.

"It was possible for me to go to Rouen and be with him for two days. I helped him to

get ready at the moment of departure. I was able to say good-bye to him without tears; some force within me sustained me and carried me on, filling my soul at the same time with grief and joy—the profound feeling that we could not give more. And so, in the middle of my trouble, there was almost happiness. Do you understand me?

"Pray with me and with the children for him, that he may be brave and strong whatever happens, and that he may come back to me."

I wrote myself to the address given, and he sent these lines in reply: "Thank you so much, dear friend, for your affectionate letter. It was such a joy, and above all because you spoke with such praise of my dear one. . . . To you, dear friend, in great part is due whatever goodness there is in our home. Did you not plan our way of life for us? How many families there are, full of good intentions, who would

have done still more than we if their path had been pointed out to them as clearly as was ours!"

I have seen the letters which he wrote to his wife and children, never letting a day pass, unless absolutely prevented, without writing them a few lines. The correspondence is too intimate to publish, and I will only quote the last pages, written just before he was mortally wounded. This is how he wrote when on the point of going up into the front trenches:

"I can face going up to the trenches this time without any anxiety, or perhaps I should say without too much. I am confident that God will be with me, and will give me courage to face danger bravely if need be, and to bear without too much complaining the hardships or sufferings that I shall meet. Then, too, I am going with the conviction that your thoughts for me, and the children's, will support my courage in moments of trial. Yes,

all that makes me brave. Be brave too, and do not be anxious about me. Either I shall come back safe and sound—and in this case what we count best will be realized—or I shall be wounded, perhaps seriously, perhaps slightly, and we shall not have anything to complain of overmuch. But if God should ask of us the crowning sacrifice of my life, we must both of us freely and fully consent, that the sacrifice may be perfect." [1]

[1] Without pretending that such a perfect frame of mind is to be met with everywhere at the front, I have the right to say that it is not so rare as one would think. The young soldier father referred to in the letter from a friend of mine quoted above (p. 57), wrote to his wife only a few hours before the attack in which he was killed: "I was able to receive the Blessed Sacrament this morning, and I am quite at rest, for God is within me."

Here is another example of the same feeling, told me by one who saw it himself. When the second offensive in Champagne was at its height, on about October 4 or 5, an ambulance and some loads of ammunition had just been blown up by shell at the cross-

And now I will give, without further comment, the essential passages of the letters he wrote in the middle of these last attacks.

September 29, 1915.—"What fresh experiences I have had—many of them sad enough, since this furious battle began four days ago. . . . I am very well, but rather tired; no sleep, and not enough to eat. So I have black rings under my eyes, that is all that is the matter with me, except that I find it impossible to write, as the terrific shelling rather stupefies me."

October 1. *Perthes-les-Hurlus.*—"Well, I have got off without a scratch after all! Our spell is over. Let us thank God for it. I am no longer in immediate danger.

roads of Souain. Everything was blown to pieces. The bravest were shaken and were even hesitating whether to continue the advance. One young boy of the 1915 class shouted out exultingly, "What do I care? I made my Communion this morning!"

What a life it has been these last days! It is incredible to think that one can still see to-day what we are seeing now. What a lot of things I have to tell you! I will try little by little—be patient with me . . . I am going to attempt to focus some of my impressions. It will be difficult, for one loses all sense of time under these conditions. Without the least exaggeration I have not had five hours' sleep in four or five days.

"On the twenty-fifth, at midnight, we left the trenches in the wood opposite the Tahure hill. On the twenty-sixth, at four in the morning, we made our attack. That night, at midnight, I was sent to find supplies in some place or other."

Monday, October 4. *In the neighbourhood of Perthes.*

"To-day I just want to tell you how the attack on the Tahure hill, in which I took part, went as far as I was concerned. At two o'clock in the afternoon they

told us that the attack would be made at four—we got everything ready for it. At half-past three the colonel, acting in concert with the other regiments who were going to take part in the battle, disposed his troops on the side of the hill, for we had to cross the ridge to attack the German lines.

"At first the colonel stayed behind to get a clear idea of the way in which his orders were being carried out.

"At a given moment he turned to us and gave the word 'Charge.' He went ahead at a swinging pace—we followed him. In this way, through rifle- and gun-fire, we crossed the most dangerous part of the ground. So far no one round me seemed to have been wounded.

"The colonel ordered me to go back with a command to my company—and I went. After a few moments I came back to the spot where I ought to have found him, but he had already gone. I looked every-

where, but did not see him. Then I went forward, hoping to find him again. I came up with an officer, but he did not know where my colonel was. I waited for a few more moments; besides, I could not have started again at once, I was so out of breath. At last I set out, but I had only gone thirty yards when I saw that I was lost. I flung myself flat on the ground, my head buried as far as possible in a small hole in the ground to escape the bullets. Meanwhile, with the help of my entrenching tool I made the hole bigger, so as to get better cover. From time to time I raised my head to make sure of what was happening round me. Bullets whistled over me all the time. I was utterly alone; there was no one in front of me or behind me. I was lost, there was no doubt. There was only one thing for me to do—wait for night in my hole, and under cover of darkness try to rejoin my regiment.

"Can you imagine the moments I lived through crossing this bit of ground swept by bullets and shell and waiting alone in my hole? I was certainly very calm, and did not lose my head in the least—I had complete trust in God's protection. As I told you in the line I sent yesterday I promised that if I came back safe and sound from this war we should try to lead the best life possible for ourselves and our children. On the other hand, if I am called on to give up my life, I surrender it willingly for your greater good. In this frame of mind I face the fire bravely. Either God preserves me and I shall return happily to you all to take up our happy life again; or if I die, I know that I am not dying like an animal. I am conscious of what I am doing and of the good which you will gain from my sacrifice; for I have no illusions, the sacrifice of my life may be of far greater good to you than if I were left with you,

and now more than ever we must be ready to do whatever is for the best. Well, to go back, don't be anxious. Everything is perfectly right with me: I am doing my part quite calmly. Bullets, shell and shrapnel may do what they like to me: whatever may happen, *I have faced it out*, and I know that my mind is now at rest and quite resolute. One of the best proofs that I am right is the coolness with which I hear the bullets coming. I don't flinch; I naturally take the precaution of lying down, but that is all.

"When I feel that I am in special danger I call on the protection of all our dear ones who have died, mother above all, who had such a horror of war. They must have power with God to make me accept His will courageously. Yes, after all, that is the real thing: to ask God to help one to accept His will unflinchingly. One can wish for one thing or another, but as we never know what is best for us,

we must always add in our prayers: 'This is what I ask of Thee; but, O God, I trust entirely to Thee, and whatever may be Thy will for me in the future, I bow to it beforehand. Thou knowest what I need better than I.'

"This is what I feel. I hope that you, too, are always just as brave. Let us be at one. Now less than ever should I like to feel that you were losing heart. The greater the danger the braver we must be, and the more brave I feel you are, the more courageous shall I be also."

Here his journal stops. On October 7 our friend was wounded before Tahure and taken back to the hospital at C., to die there five days later.

A LETTER TO SOME CHILDREN WHOSE FATHER DIED FOR HIS COUNTRY

III

A LETTER TO SOME CHILDREN WHOSE FATHER DIED FOR HIS COUNTRY

THE following is a letter which I wrote to the children of my friend whose death I have spoken of in the previous chapter. I reproduce it in the hope that it is, as I have been told, applicable to other orphans of the war. Circumstances may vary, but the sorrow is the same for all, and the same lessons of honour, courage and patriotism are to be learnt from the heroic sacrifice of all fathers who have lost their lives.

NEUILLY, *November* 19, 1915.

I do not yet know, my dear little friends, when I shall have time to come and be with you in your sorrow. I must stay with our

wounded, and there are more here than ever since those battles in Champagne in which your dear father lost his life. As I cannot see you yet I want just to write and tell you how deeply I share in your sorrow and your pride. I want a letter as far as possible to take the place of the intimate talk I would have liked to have with you.

There are some memories which will always stay fresh in your minds and which will teach you far better than I could. You will never forget those awful and wonderful moments when your mother called you to her room and told you that your father was no longer living. I would not wish to penetrate into the secret of what happened then; but I am sure that in her faith and tenderness she found strength to say what was best. Dear children, these sacred moments must influence your whole lives, and the recollection of them must uphold you in all times of weakness

and temptation. And your dear mother, who now lives only for you, must for the future find in you her consolation, her support, the one joy still left her in her sad life. Which of you would dare to grieve her now that she is so unhappy? But I cannot really imagine such a thing. You have always been so full of tender care for her. I am sure that you will be so still, and that you will go on growing more and more thoughtful for her. Her one source of joy in this world is your trust and your love; she must never lose them.

That, certainly, was one of your father's keenest wishes; and I am sure he will have told you so in the sealed letters he left with your uncle for each of you shortly before the great battle. The whole course of your life will be guided by the counsel he gave you in those letters. He had been dead for nearly three weeks when you got them; you heard him speak for the last

time and his words came to you from beyond the grave, from Heaven where you must be with him again some day in the presence of God. It is but a little time since you submitted to his kind yet strict discipline. Now that he speaks to you from above you will feel even more respect, you will be even more affectionate and obedient to him. In your conduct to your mother and to every one else, and in all that you do, you will try to carry out his wishes; you will do what he has told you to do, and avoid what he has told you to avoid; you will faithfully keep the promises he asked you to make. You will remember that he is watching you, hearing what you say, following you unseen in each of your actions, even in your thoughts; and your dearest desire will be to deserve his approval in everything.

Among your greatest motives for being good is one which he could not explain to you himself; but you will certainly have

realized it, and will like me to say something about it: I mean the beauty of his example, the pattern of honour, uprightness and courage which he leaves you in his life and in his death. All his life he was a good man and a hard-worker, and he wants you to be the same; but at the end he had reached a height of perfection which, at any rate in normal times, is vouchsafed to few men. How unsparingly he devoted himself, before the war, to his public duties and to the welfare of the community! How eagerly, I might even say impatiently, he answered the call of France when the time came to risk not his life only, but also what he valued much more, the safety and the earthly happiness of his wife and children! And by this he may be judged, that he had so completely carried you and your mother with him in his moral progress that when he went all of you, each as perfectly as he was able, though your understanding of it varied with your age, offered

to God and to your country all that they could ask; with splendid generosity you made your sacrifice beforehand.

You know how your father kept his pledge. His many letters enabled you to follow his life almost day by day during the time of training and the months at the front; they showed you the keenness, courage and spirit of good comradeship which he always displayed. The letters quite at the end, in which he could not help showing his bodily fatigue, revealed in spite of it a spirit that was more and more noble, generous and disinterested, absorbed in the only things that matter. At a time when his physical exhaustion would have justified him in asking a few days' rest, his only thought was to devote himself more and more to duty, and he had done so well that at that very time his superiors in command, in recognition of his merits, were going to give him a more responsible post. Death came; it found him ready;

it found him in full possession of the ideal he had set before him.

And so he fell gloriously, hit by a bomb, in this fierce victory in Champagne, which will, doubtless, mark for history the first blow to the invaders of our country. He is one of those who began the work of liberation; and when, in later years, men praise in your presence the great army which paid for the safety of France with its blood, you can say: "My father was there." And the nation will return to you by its tenderness and watchful protection the debt of gratitude it owes to him.

But you, too, have a debt to discharge. Never forget that, thanks to him and to many other fathers and elder brothers fallen like him on the field of battle, your country is kept proud and free for you and your contemporaries. Children of France, be worthy of your destiny! Your fathers have died for France; you will live for her. They gave to her their weariness,

their privations, their wounds, their last sigh; you will not refuse to work for her, to make yourselves good for her sake. You have to serve and to exalt this country which they have saved for you; you have to make her great and beautiful, worthy of the terrible cost at which they redeemed her.

Even victorious as she will be without a shadow of doubt, she will have suffered greatly, our dear country; she will have lost much of her material prosperity, of the glories of her art; she will have lost the best of her sons. Soon when you are grown up you will renew her treasures by your labours; you will build anew her prosperity and clothe it with spiritual beauty; above all, your great desire will be to make good her losses in men by the many children whom you in turn will give to her, and whom you will bring up as your father brought you up as your mother is bringing you up now, in

those principles of honour, faith and generosity to which your ancestors held, and which alone make great nations.

But while we wait to see the cruel gaps left by the war filled by the many children that shall be born French people will see their ranks sadly thinned. And it must be—never forget it for a moment—it must be that those who are left will try to make up for all that is lost by being all the more good, hard-working, educated, honest and sober. They must respect one another, bear with one another, love one another. It is enough to have had enemies without, we must have no more within. France, too, is a mother, and a mother in mourning for her sons. She will ask, she is asking, that round her flag, adorned with the laurels of victory, though draped in black, her sons who survive shall treat one another henceforward as brothers.

Thus to accomplish the work begun by

their fathers is an honour of which the children of to-day are not unworthy. Have they not had their share in the common trial, a great and sorrowful share ?

You know it well, poor little friends, for you have so often trembled for your father's life, and for the lives of other members of your family whom you loved ; you have shed such bitter tears for them. And yet, in this war, there are children even more to be pitied than you. In Belgium and Poland and in the north and east of France there are children who have lost not only their father but their mother and their whole family—orphans who are alone in the world and would die of poverty if they were not cared for by public charity. At the American Hospital at Neuilly our stretcher-bearers one day brought from the neighbourhood of Arras, where they had been working at the front for some weeks, a little six-year-old boy whom they had found in the ruins of a village, with

both his legs crushed; one of his sisters sat by his side, weeping, and his mother and another little sister were both lying dead near by, killed by a shell. And how many other little ones at this moment are dying of cold and hunger in the mountains of Armenia and Serbia, where every one who could escape the sword of the Austro-Germans, the Bulgarians and the Turks, fled helpless before the invasion?

You in your trial at least have your mother still, your family, your home; think of the children who are less fortunate than you. Offer to God on their behalf your courageous resignation to your sufferings, and the merit that follows your work; on their behalf offer your prayers and pity from your hearts. Through these good acts and feelings you yourselves will grow richer and stronger. At the same time you will help to make our victory more prompt and more complete; for it is not only guns and bayonets which

decide the fate of armies, but also the moral forces of the whole nation that lie behind. And from this point of view, who can tell what is the value of a child's soul ? I have just been reminding you of what France expects of you when you are grown up, and of the honour it will be for you later on to finish the work begun by your dear father. But we must not only look to the future and prepare for it ; in the present, too, you are going to fulfil your great task ; from now onwards, everywhere and in everything, you will show yourselves worthy of your origin, watchfully devoted to your dear mother, the hero-children of a hero-father.

I am proud to call myself always your parents' friend and yours.

F. K.

A MISSING SON

IV

A MISSING SON

I HAVE just written the following pages in answer to a letter from England about an officer in the 7th Seaforth Highlanders, reported missing after the great offensive of September in Artois. He had been badly wounded in the attack on the Hohenzollern redoubt and left in the trenches the first night. An attempt was made next morning to bring him in, but that element of the trench had fallen into the hands of the enemy. Since then there has been no news of him. Some soldiers in another regiment, however, said that they had seen a tall wounded Seaforth officer carried out on the evening of the attack. In spite of the fact that a general and several other relations of high rank

in the army have done their utmost no trace of him has been found at any hospital, British or French. And neither the Vatican, which was interested on his behalf through Cardinal Gasquet, nor the Spanish or American Ambassadors, have been able to find out if he was taken prisoner or killed by the Germans.

Many families to-day are called to face the same trial. Perhaps some of them may find grounds for hope in this letter of mine, and, if they have faith, reason for resignation.

December 1, 1915.

My dear Colonel,—

Your sister-in-law has told me of the terrible anxiety in which you are plunged about your dear son, and of the circumstances in which he disappeared. I do indeed wish I could tell you anything about him. But though we had plenty of wounded English in our hospital at the

beginning, and especially after the battle of the Marne, it is now ten months since any have come to us. They are sent to England, or to your hospitals in France on the coast and at Rouen and Versailles.

But I can assure you that if your dear son had been taken to any hospital in France you would certainly have been informed of it now that more than two months have passed. I am not alone in that admiration and affectionate sympathy which you noticed in my book [1] whenever English wounded were mentioned. We all feel the same towards your gallant army, and there is no hospital in France which would willingly leave an English family in such prolonged anxiety.

Still, I have done all I could to make inquiries in all possible directions about your missing boy. If my investigations have not, unfortunately, resulted in dis-

[1] *The Diary of a French Army Chaplain*, London, Melrose, Limited.

covering him, yet they have given me a some grounds for hope, which I will tell you for what it is worth without exaggerating its importance; it may be some relief to you and his mother.

Your best remaining chance is that your son is a prisoner. This is quite possible. It is true that we have much against the Germans, but all that I have heard of their treatment of wounded prisoners—of the French, anyhow—is thoroughly to their credit; and I have personal knowledge of a good many cases. What I particularly want to tell you, and what concerns you more closely, is something that was said to me in the course of my inquiries after your son by a French major, a friend of mine, who is back from the northern front on leave. I will quote his own words:

"Your English officer was probably looked after in some German hospital in the North of France or in Belgium. I was talking the other day to a refugee from

Lille who managed to escape—I am sorry to say I did not take his name or address. He told me that he had seen a great number of wounded French and English in his town, who were well cared for, but who were quite unable to communicate with their families. This is the case with all the wounded men or prisoners who are in territory occupied by the Germans; it is always impossible to get news of them by the regular channels."

These strict regulations apply as a rule to civilians as well, and I remember that two French soldiers who had each lost a leg and had been sent back here after being in the German hospital at Cambrai, brought back news of the inhabitants of that town to some of their relations who had heard nothing of them since the beginning of the war.

Whatever satisfaction I may feel in dwelling on this hope that is still left you, I do not conceal from myself that it can

only lessen your distress, but not dispel it. I feel for you sincerely, and I pray God with all my heart to help you to bear your burden. Perhaps there is no trial more severe than uncertainty of this kind; and I have seen poor mothers who, after long months of it, would rather have had bad news than this anxiety. "At least," they have said, "we should know how to think of him we love, and our faith would find comfort in the knowledge that he is with God." And one can understand this loss of courage.

But we must try to realize that the greater our trial the better are the opportunities of sacrifice which it offers us; that sorrows kept alive like this every day by the expectation of possible news, good or bad, are a unique testimony, if they are taken well, to our love of God, and that the merit of such a submission to Providence, if it is offered on behalf of those we love, procures for them, without any

doubt, the richest blessings, blessings which our heavenly Father can pour out upon them wherever they may be, in this world or the next.

I will not dwell on the differences in our faith, for they do not in any way prevent us from sharing the same hopes. I shall venture to speak quite simply to you and your wife as the true Christians that you are, and I shall say to you: I do not know how long your trial will endure, but he whom you love will assuredly be restored to you; the only doubt is when the time for reunion will come. You will meet him again, on earth or in heaven. If you were convinced that you would see him again, well and happy, in five or six years, it would certainly seem a long time to wait, but you would reconcile yourselves to it. Christ's words assure you that you will see him again, whenever the time may come, and you know that the longest lives are short in the light of eternity. Jesus

Christ Himself says of your dear son as He said once of Lazarus: "Although he be dead, he shall live." Although he be dead, he shall live, and you will see him again! It seems to me that these sweet and solemn words have a quite peculiarly intimate meaning for poor parents like you, consumed with anxiety, and that as He spoke them to Martha and Mary the divine Master was thinking of you individually, and of all those who are now enduring a like trial.

Even if they are dead, our loved ones who have disappeared will live! Yes, it is Jesus Himself Who gives the assurance; and I may well add in the words of His great Apostle, "Wherefore comfort ye one another with these words."

But, to end this unduly long letter, let me say once more that I sincerely hope that your gallant son is not dead, and I have told you the reasons for my belief. But whatever may be God's purpose, I

pray that He may help you and your wife to acquiesce in it, and by your submission to promote His glory and the good of your souls, and of your son's soul, and at the same time to bring a swifter ending to the sorrows which have come upon so many poor families.

Believe me, my dear Colonel, with all respects,

Yours sincerely,

F. K.

A WIDOW IN MOURNING
FOR HER ONLY SON

V

A WIDOW IN MOURNING FOR HER ONLY SON

THE following lines reached me early in December from a poor woman who had lost her husband two years before and whose only son died in our hospital in the middle of October. In the hope of helping other mothers in like case, I got her permission to publish her letter and my answer.

December 6, 1915.

MONSIEUR L'AUMÔNIER,—

The great kindness which you showed me at the time of my poor child's funeral touched me deeply, and I want to tell you how very grateful I am. At the same time, may I ask something of you which I

am sure your kind heart will not refuse—to write and tell me all the details of Lucien's last moments? His broken words, his feeble gestures, his sufferings, and his last wishes will be, indeed, precious to me—my last memorials of him. I venture to hope, Monsieur l'aumônier, that you will grant me this last consolation.

His holy Christian death is a great comfort in my grief. Pray that there may be some merit in my resignation which God will turn into blessings for our dear soldiers who are defending French soil so heroically. May He bless and protect them and lead them to the final victory.

Forgive a poor mother in her sorrow who, perhaps, seems to you to ask too much; but everything to do with our poor martyrs must be sacred to us. So you, who heard his last confidences will, I am sure, grant his poor mother her wish.

Here is my answer:

NEUILLY,
December 17, 1915.

Your request, madame, is so natural and so moving that I hasten to answer it as best I can.

I have certainly not forgotten your dear son. On the contrary, he has left very vivid and touching recollections behind him. But my heart always remembers better than my mind, and, allowing for the great number of wounded we have here, you will forgive me if after an interval of two months I cannot reconstruct the details as completely as you would wish.

Lucien's sufferings, which were severe enough at first, did not increase as he grew worse—rather you can think of him as in less and less pain as death drew nearer. Indeed, this is the case with most of the wounded, and that is some consolation for their sorrowing families. Those whom they mourn have not suffered as

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much in their last days as might be feared. Not to speak of general weakness which diminishes the capacity for feeling pain, a very bad leg or arm wound, especially when mortification sets in, often deprives the nerves of much of their sensitiveness. Your dear child was comparatively comfortable the day before his operation; I rather think I remember that you saw him that afternoon, and that you too thought he was better.

As I had already had only too much experience of such cases, I personally felt less reassured. Still, when I was called to him in the operating theatre at five in the morning, it was a shock to me to hear the doctors say that his case was very urgent. The dear boy, I can still see him lying there—his poor body, free from pain poisoned though it was, as quiet as his soul, which was full of peace and trust in God. I was more moved than he.

They left us for a few moments. After a very short Confession I went to bring him the Blessed Sacrament, and gave him the great help of Communion. He could not say enough to thank me, and to all my assurances, which were perfectly sincere, that the operation involved little danger, he answered gently: "I am not afraid to die."

He asked me if he was going to see you again. I told him that they had gone to find you. As the motor did not come back soon enough, it was impossible to wait for you, and I promised that you would visit him later. He took this without a murmur, like all his other trials. To see him, so good and peaceful, not ceasing his prayers while the orderlies took off his things and made him ready for the amputation, one would have said that he was a soul shedding his earthly coverings. And when they began to put him under an anæsthetic, still absorbed

in his thanksgiving, I knew what our passage from earth to heaven might be, if only sin had not come into the world.

On my way down to the chapel just below, you may remember that I met you and told you what was happening, and asked you to come and hear the Mass which I was going to say for him. After the Holy Sacrifice I went up to the operating theatre again and brought you back the surgeon's favourable report. They had just put the dear fellow into his bed again after the operation. A little later you were allowed to see him, but he was still under the influence of chloroform, and I do not think you had the consolation of speaking to him all day. Nor did I. But that evening, when you had gone away, not over-anxious, I went to see him again, and found his fever rising. At nine he was still more restless, and I was told that he was growing steadily weaker. He was then perfectly conscious, and I suggested

to him, and he readily agreed, that he should say with me *Our Father* and *Hail Mary*, commit his spirit into God's hands, and receive Extreme Unction, which would both cleanse and strengthen his soul. Throughout he showed the faith and piety which you know to be his, or rather which he owes to you and for which he blesses you in heaven to-day with a tender gratitude which will never cease.

An interval of calm, as so often happens, followed the administration of Extreme Unction. A quarter of an hour later his mind became less clear. He asked for something to drink and refused what was offered him, calling for *alcool de menthe*; there was none at hand, and he grew rather impatient while they were looking for it. It was the first sign of impatience since he had been wounded, and that proves that for the moment he did not know what he was doing. When he was quieted I suggested to him for the last time a short act of

love to God, and I bade him *au revoir*. Next morning I heard that he had fallen into a peaceful sleep soon after I left him and only woke again in heaven.

There you must think of him, and there you will assuredly find him once more with his father, and for ever you will rest, all three together, happy in the possession of the divine life. Trust your mother's heart, your Christian instinct. They do not deceive you. I declare it as a priest, and as one who was helped by witnessing this truly sainted death. Your son is, indeed, one of this younger generation of Catholics of whom France may be proud and who will have contributed so much to make her worthy of the admiration of other nations. Our older soldiers are also showing themselves equal to the great duties which are to-day being laid upon them; no one refuses to give his life for his country; half of them come back gladly to the sacraments which were a joy

to them in their youth, and nearly all come to Mass when they have the opportunity. But no one will take it ill if I say that, as it seems to me, the younger men are even more heroic in their efforts, and that, from the religious point of view, they show a simplicity of heart which is more free from regard for men's opinion. Who would not be glad that generations are growing up in France before our eyes capable of answering to the needs of so critical a time ? The same valour is to be found among those who are not of the faith, and I am glad to proclaim it. But I want to say of our fellow-Catholics that they do honour to those who trained them, to the founders of their associations, and to the young clergy.

Your dear son is one of those who has most helped me to recognize it. I remember that during the first days he spoke to me more than once with great affection of the fellow-members of his guild and of the

vicaire who is its director. Their presence at his funeral and their obvious feeling show that this affection was mutual.

However imperfect they may be, these recollections tell you once more what a fine soul your son had. Perhaps I should be afraid of making your sorrow even greater by reminding you of all you have lost in him. But no, nothing can be more sweet to you than the sound of his praise in the mouth of those who knew him. You loved him, and you love him still, for himself. While he was alive you thought more of his goodness than of the joy that he was yours; and now that he has returned to God his happiness weighs more with you than your grief at losing him. You can say with a heroism whose cost God alone knows: "If one of us two must stay and suffer in the world, it had better be I." You said this before when you lost your husband; now when you have

lost your son, you are saying it once more, for the last time.

Comfort yourself with the thought that both are waiting for you in heaven. Life seems long when one is suffering, but it is not really so. You have certainly lived more than half your life. Think how swiftly it has gone by. The remaining years will pass in the same way.

When your trial weighs too heavily upon you, you will think of the good that may spring from it for your dear ones who have passed away and for yourself, that all may grow in divine life and happiness that has no ending.

"I can see well enough that I need this suffering," you say readily, "for I have much to do to become what God wishes me. But if, as I hope with all my soul, they are both in heaven, what have I left to do for them?"

Like you I wish that they may have already attained the joys of eternity.

But in these joys, that is in the vision and the love of God which are their source, you know that the degrees are infinite. It rests with you, your prayers, and actions, your perfect submission, to raise them higher in the possession of these heavenly treasures. All that you are doing and will do for them, all that you can bear and offer up as a sacrifice God has taken into account—or rather one may say He is taking it into account, for there is no past and no future in His sight. He knew your prayers, your coming merit, and He knew them beforehand, when He helped by His grace those you have lost. Take courage, then, in your sorrow, which is not without its happiness ; as the richest harvest grows on soil that has been best prepared, so the welfare of those you love springs up and blossoms, is born and nourished from your labour, your efforts, the sorrow that you have borne with patience.

But I long for your Christian heart to have a still larger field, for your spirit to embrace the whole splendid horizon of faith. Our glorious belief about the Communion of Saints is not confined in its teaching to the souls of those nearest to us; it reaches out to the whole family of the children of God. *Our* Father Who is in heaven has not set bounds to the sense of brotherhood, to that community in the beginning and end of our being which unites all of us to one another. Obedient to His laws and His designs you will not think only of your own family. You will suffer and work and pray, as you already do, but as we must always do increasingly, first for our country, for France, which, with you, held all your son's earthly love; and beyond our beloved country (I wish to lay emphasis on this, for it is easy to forget it) you will intercede and win merit for the whole of humanity—humanity which now in its pangs is giving birth to so great

a future. And if you even went so far as to offer your prayers for our enemies, especially for those of them who have fallen in this war, it would gladden the heart of the Father of all mankind, of Christ Who died for His murderers, of your son himself and his companions in glory, now citizens of the heavenly country that has no frontiers.

Doubtless, you will say to me, in your humility and overwhelming grief: "I would gladly bear my suffering and offer it up in that frame of mind, but it is too much for one like me. Again and again after vain efforts to rise I fall once more beneath the weight of my grief, and if, thanks to God, I have moments of courage to endure, twenty times in the day I feel the flood of unconsolable grief and tears rushing over me, and I can see nothing but my sorrow and my loneliness."

Do not believe that at such moments

you are less well-pleasing to our Lord. He knows the bitterness of tears. He, too, has shed them, over His doomed country; over the tomb of Lazarus; and when His Passion drew nearer and He asked His Father to save Him from it, if it were possible. As St. Paul says,[1] He can help us in our sufferings, for He Himself has known them.

Think that of all human sufferings there is none that touches Him more than yours. The Gospel tells us so, showing Him "moved with compassion" when He meets at the gates of Nain a funeral procession just like that in which we took part two months ago: "He was," St. Luke tells us, "the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."[2]

I remember now that this scene filled my mind during Mass and during my thanksgiving on the morning of the operation, while you were near me, and while

[1] Hebrew ii. 18. [2] St. Luke vii. 12.

before me on the altar and then in my heart was He who gave His command to the dead at Nain: "Young man, I say unto thee, arise." And with faith such as I have rarely felt I prayed Him to restore, as in the Gospel, this son to his mother.

Be sure that if He did not grant what we asked of Him in our prayer it was because His purpose for your son and you was still more merciful than what we wished for. If, despite prayers such as these, and despite His love, He lets bitter sufferings come upon us, it must be that He knows that they are infinitely good for us; it must be that He sees in them, and for our sake ordains in them, the root of an eternal happiness as perfect as can be bestowed on any human creature.

But now you tell me gently that I must not speak to you as if you were a saint when you are not; you say that you are only a poor, forlorn woman; and you add that if I expect all this of you, it is that

I do not know you. It is true that I have seen but little of you—but what I have seen has been under circumstances which reveal the soul as it is; with your son in his sufferings; with your son as he was dying; with your son as he lay dead. There I saw what your faith was; I saw, too, what his faith was, and that you had given it him. I can then say that you are in any case a Christian. Why not become even more—a saint?

What is there still to hinder you? What could make you cling to the world when you have in heaven all that your heart holds dear. Will you say that you are ignorant of the things of God? But it is our love that He demands, not our knowledge; and His secrets, hidden, according to His saying, from the wise and prudent, are revealed to the humble. Will you plead your weakness, the weariness of age, the little inclination which is left to you for any kind of effort or new under-

taking? Then the time has come for you, before anything else, to develop the life of your soul, perhaps rather neglected in former years, and to give henceforth to God, directly or in the person of the unfortunate, an ever-increasing share in your thoughts, in the impulses of your heart, in the activities that are still open to you. Granted that it is as you say, that you have come to the end of activities in the world: this is one more reason for your withdrawal into yourself and into God. If you can do nothing else, I tell you frankly, you must follow after holiness.

You have a great example before you in the Blessed Virgin, who like you was a sorrowing, a weeping mother, *Mater Dolorosa, Mater Lacrymosa.* She had lost the dear companion of her life, St. Joseph, and, like you, saw her only Son die, but amid more cruel torments than yours; like you, she was left alone on earth. Submit like her, wait like her, suffer

lovingly with her—*Fac me tecum pie flere.* Soon, when she sees your soul reunited to your son's soul in the infinite love and happiness, she will say once more her *Magnificat*; she will glorify her beloved Son for having with so tender a foreknowledge ordered all things and all events—sorrow as well as joy, death as well as life—for the eternal welfare of mothers and their children.

I will pray faithfully for your son and for you. Do you pray also for our wounded men and for their *aumônier*.

TO THOSE WHO HAVE LOST
THEIR LOVERS

VI

TO THOSE WHO HAVE LOST THEIR LOVERS

Of all the sorrows which are multiplied by the war, none is more touching than the sorrow of those who have lost their lovers; and perhaps, at least at the first, it seems to be the most hopeless. I need hardly say that I am not thinking of girls who have nothing more than the grief of seeing a happy prospect of a *mariage de convenance* disappear—I am thinking of those who were in love with the man they were going to marry and knew that they were loved in return, who had built on the foundation of this mutual love all their dreams of happiness, all their plans for the future, and now see death at one blow bring their hopes to nothing. Take, for example,

the case of a young English girl who went to Serbia to nurse typhus patients and got to know and care for an Englishman of her own age, an orderly in the same hospital. Inspired by the same ideal they were naturally drawn to one another, and hoped that their lives, brought together under such circumstances, would never again be separated. After a few months, and almost at the same time, the fever which they were both tending day and night attacked them both. When the girl recovered she heard that he had died.

Here is another instance, still more pitiful, that of a young French girl whom I know, engaged to a foreigner. The engagement had not yet been made public, but the two families, seeing that their love was deep and sincere, had wisely given their consent. War broke out, and it was the young man's terrible duty to fight against the country of the woman he loved. . . . He was killed in one of the

first engagements, and his mother wrote a wonderful letter to the poor girl. Could one imagine anything more heart-rending ?

In the course of last winter I saw two of the wounded at our hospital who were visited almost every day by their mothers and two charming girls. One of the men was making rapid strides to recovery, and his fiancée grew more and more radiant with happiness. With the other it was very different. His wound got steadily worse ; every day he grew thinner and paler and more feverish, and we were increasingly anxious ; you could tell the progress of the mischief by the despair written in his fiancée's face. The first recovered, and one morning about midday I was present at his marriage in a church near by. A few hours later —the coincidence is a fact—the other was at the point of death. When I had given him Extreme Unction I pressed his mother's hand and showed her by a look

the sympathy which was almost too much for me. She was obviously touched; but when I turned to the poor girl she was motionless, and did not give me her hand or notice anything. She seemed as near to death as her dying lover.

One must indeed pity them, these girls left desolate. And in spite of the almost fierce silence behind which many of them would like to hide themselves, one longs to draw near to them and gently and shyly try to soften their grief with a little sympathy. We understand their despair so well and realize that the trial for them is in a sense even more bitter than for a young wife, especially one who has children left her. Like her they have lost the man they loved and all the happiness that centred round him; but they lose as well something of themselves, the best, the most beautiful part of the spring-time of their life; a sudden frost

checks the long-awaited development of their rich nature, which had begun so well. Their aspirations sink back powerless and unsatisfied just as they are on the point of realization. Carried away by the eager desire for self-surrender, surrender to the man they love and to the children they long for, they see cruel death crushing the instinct which was urging them to become wives and mothers. Before their eyes vanish into smoke not the vague dreams of girlhood but the realities which they were on the point of grasping, and which, high and beautiful in themselves, perhaps seemed to them even more beautiful than anything experience could have brought.

If, indeed, their trial is made up of all these great troubles, what could we do to soften it? What could we say to them in our eager desire to comfort them? Bereft of him they love, and, as a result, of all that was going to widen and en-

noble their life; bereft at one moment, if I can express it so, of him and of themselves, have they any consolations but those that come with time, the very idea of which would revolt them, or those that come from prayer, which they are sure to seek from God without words of ours?

No, I cannot bear to leave you, poor heart-broken children, to your crippled lives without any word of consolation. Let me at the very least tell you that your friend is not entirely lost to you. Poor comfort though it may be, his picture and his memory are with you still, and in that way he lives in your mind and in your heart with a youthful splendour that age and care will not destroy, with that freshness of soul which the years can never poil, always the man whom you have known and loved. Indeed you will, and with reason, feel yourself more than ever drawn to him, transfigured as he is by

his sacrifice, for ever part of a glorious epic, one of the heroes of whom nations are proud. Whenever men speak of this war—and it will always be the great event the one date which counts—they will seem to you to speak of him. You will meet him everywhere: in common talk, in books, in monuments, in story and in legend. In the immeasurable depths of mourning and of glory he will be your own special part of the sorrow and pride of the nation.

To this immortality which he will have in common with his brothers-in-arms you have the power to add something more personal, which he will owe solely to you, something far more concrete, effective and living. It will rest with you to carry out, at least in part, the plans of work which you made together, and to do alone, less completely, perhaps, and certainly less joyously, but with greater courage and still more merit, what you once dreamt of doing together

All the good that you do in spiritual union with him will perpetuate him, and, what is more, will make him happy. Your reason confirms your belief in the immortality of the soul; religion teaches you the communion of saints: that is to say, the permanence of relations between the dead and the living, their interchange of merit and of prayer, the continuance, or better still the development, of their true affections. It will indeed be an encouragement for you to think that in all that you do you can, on the one hand, ask his help and intercession with God, and on the other, give him a share in the blessings which follow. Far from giving up all development of your activities you will extend and multiply them. You will work for him as much as and more than for yourself.

I know of a young English girl—it was before the war, and her case is no longer

so rare—who for long months nursed her fiancé in a fatal illness. To the end he cherished unfounded hopes of recovery; courageously she fostered them, though she had lost all hope herself, and smiled on his dreams of the future; she even, because he had set his heart upon it, got ready her wedding dress and put it on for him. When he passed away peacefully, his hand in hers, she at last gave free course to her tears, but she did not lose courage. She sold the property left her by her father and founded a home, in a place I could name, where she could continue the life of a nurse, now so dear to her.

I have heard of another girl, also English, who after her bereavement went into a convent, certainly not out of despair, but freely and cheerfully; and far from training herself to forget, she continually thanks God for the wonderful love He had granted her.

It is only discretion that prevents me

from adding to these examples from the nation of our friends others no less touching which I have come across in France. They are to be found in numbers—in our homes, in our convents, in every kind of work—girls who do not renounce the love of their youth but cherish it and let it find an outlet in caring for all the secret and open evils, all the physical and moral suffering around them. Mothers to the orphans, daughters to the aged who have lost their children, sisters to those whose souls have grown embittered, in the name of Christ they help all who beg for love or succour, and go about everywhere making their own trial a source of happiness to others. Their lives which might have been so limited grow richer, and in their hearts before God they exalt the hero they love so faithfully, who, from the bright side of the grave, follows them with his eyes, approving them, waiting for them.

FRENCH PEASANTS

VII

FRENCH PEASANTS

I

A Man from Beauce

December 29, 1915.—For several days a brave and simple peasant from Beauce has lain dying here in an isolated room. He came to us in the middle of October, like so many others, after the offensive in Champagne. We have seen a good deal of one another and have become good friends, though I have not noticed his name, and he will always be ignorant of mine—he is a wounded soldier, I am the chaplain. Not many words have passed between us, for, besides other wounds, his face and mouth are seriously hurt.

Christmas gave me the chance of proposing to him without any allusion to the

seriousness of his condition that he should receive Absolution and make his Communion. Since he has received these two Sacraments his resignation, which has never faltered, has been more perfect than ever; what was perhaps natural fatalism has opened out into a gentler and more luminous state of mind. Every day, morning and evening, we say a prayer together: *Our Father*, and *Hail, Mary*, followed by some personal petitions. The first time this was at my suggestion; the second time he asked himself, and now it is always he who takes the initiative. I make it a condition, to avoid fatigue, that he will content himself with joining silently without saying the words aloud. He slowly crosses himself at the end.

He was so weak this evening that I proposed to give him Extreme Unction. "I should be glad," he answered, trying to press my hand and smile a little. No other sign of emotion on his part or on

mine. I only said to him when I had finished, "God is well pleased with you; I will say Mass for you to-morrow morning," and I got ready to go away.

But he interposed: "Monsieur le curé, our evening prayer!"

In the middle of the *Pater* I said the words "Thy will be done" very slowly; and after the *Ave Maria* I added with a pause between each sentence—

"My God, I love Thee with all my heart, and I am sorry for my sins. My God, I bow to my sufferings. . . . I thank Thee for having given me all the Sacraments. . . . I hope to get well and then I shall lead the life of a good Christian. . . . But if it be Thy pleasure to take me now, Thy will be done."

I had rather hesitated to suggest this last thought, but he seemed to me to be strong enough to take it rightly. My joy was great when I heard him say to me at once:

"Monsieur le curé, that is well." They were his last words—and he is one of those who are thought to have lost the faith!

December 31.—Yesterday when I went back to the little room the iron bed was empty. To-day, without any ceremonial, they have taken his body from the mortuary. He is on the way now to his village; his family have claimed him. There in the little cemetery the prayers will be offered over him in the presence of a few peasants well used by now to these home-comings from the war. What could be more simple, yet what more great?

II

Breton Parents

The wounded are coming to us almost daily from Verdun, the majority of them seriously hurt, and even more overwhelmed by the sights they have seen than by their

own sufferings, yet full of confidence in the ultimate victory. I had just noticed one of them, a handsome young Breton of twenty-four, who, except for the bandage round his head (he had been trepanned), bore no trace of wounds. He seemed well on the way to recovery, and we had so many of them still in danger! Besides, he had made his Easter Communion devoutly, so I felt no anxiety about the state of either his soul or his body.

And then suddenly, five or six days ago, he became feverish again, lost consciousness and failed to recognize any one. Our doctors knew at once what was wrong—an abscess in the brain. With the help of X-rays they soon found where it was, but it was so situated that they could do nothing. It meant practically certain death in a very short time. I gave him Absolution once more and administered Extreme Unction, and we told his parents.

I found them by his bedside next

morning: two peasants from Finistère, about fifty years old, the woman in her peasant dress, the man clean-shaven, holding his big hat with long ribbons in his hands; both alike were strong and gentle, sad and resigned. They asked me at once if he had received the Sacraments: "For we are good Christians and he was always devout." Reassured on this point they asked me if his life would be saved. I told them that I had no right to give an opinion, that some survived, but that they must leave all in God's hands. And the father said to me simply: "God is master." Seeing their faith I suggested that we should pray together; as always, we sa d *Our Father*, and *Hail, Mary*, and then "My God, save our child; but Thy will be done." Tears were in their eyes, but they did not weep. The mother could not utter one word. I talked a little with the father and learnt that they had had three sons: the first had died as a child;

the second had been reported missing during the fighting in Champagne; the third lay there. I left them, not as strong as they were, restraining my tears.

I had to go out to various places that afternoon, and when I came back I hurried to the little room. He was sleeping his last sleep, peaceful and beautiful as he had been in life. Flags at the head of the bed proclaimed his patriotism; I put a crucifix between his folded hands to proclaim his faith. I blessed the poor body and prayed beside it, and then asked for his parents. They had consented to leave him for a moment—they consented to everything—and they had been taken to the matron's room to have something to eat. Our English and American nurses, in their admiration for the soldiers and their families, are full of the most touching care and sympathy for them.

There I found them, the poor father and mother, crushed, silent, tearless, undemon-

strative. They had not refused the food that was offered them, and I saw that they had tried to eat, but could not. We pressed one another's hands in silence. After a little I told them that I would say Mass for him next morning at seven o'clock and that they could come. They thanked me, the mother just bowing her head, the father with two words.

"You are staying here for the night?" I asked. "Yes." "I will come to show you the way." And there was again silence. But in the end I talked to them of their child's devotion, of heaven where they would find him again, of the hard time of waiting which yet in reality would soon come to an end. These appeals to their faith gradually roused them to life, and brought back the light into their eyes and the warmth into their hearts. The mother was able to tell me the praises of her "poor boy, so brave, so gentle and such a good Christian."

The father looked to the future. It was this son who used to work with him on the farm, and who was to have had it after him. He was very much afraid that the brother who was missing would never come back; besides, he had no turn for the land; he worked for M. le Marquis, who was very satisfied with him. There was a nephew left who had no parents, but he too was at the war. "If he comes back perhaps we shall arrange something. Otherwise I cannot see what there is to live for." We parted saying we would meet at Mass the next day. The family and the land—that is to say one's country; Mass and heaven—that is to say religion and its hope. . . .

What did I have to come to after these heights! That night I was called to the bedside of some one unknown, a big, young, strong man of the world, dying in agony, incapable of speech, and doubtless, too, of understanding anything. He was

shot through the head, a suicide, so they said, for the sake of some woman. He was a soldier, but, let me add quickly, he had no connexion, thank God with our hospital. At a time like this and, as it were, within sound of the cannon of Verdun! May God and France forgive him his cowardly weakness.

How glad I was to see my brave peasants that morning! When I went to the room in which they had watched over their dear dead son I found that they had already started for the chapel. Once more I let my eyes rest on the sleeping body, so as to go to the altar, my heart full of this picture. I met the parents in a corridor, one of our wounded showing them the way. I took them into the chapel and at once they knelt down. I put chairs by them, and books, but they did not seem to notice. Except when the Gospel was read and they stood, all through the Mass they knelt upright, with clasped hands

and bowed heads. One felt that they were there in the presence of God, without words, but undistracted, lost in His power and His pity, with perfect trust in His goodness despite their sorrow, joining to the infinite sacrifice of Christ their own sacrifice, their sacrifice already sublime and still becoming more perfect.

A SCHOOLMASTER SOLDIER

VIII

A SCHOOLMASTER SOLDIER

In the hecatombs of this war victims of the most diverse kinds are mingled together. It may, indeed, be called, with terrible truth, a *mêlée*, a *mêlée* not only of nations and races but, within each people, of all classes and professions and all types of character. Neither among the wounded who have been brought to our hospital, to the number of over four thousand already, nor among those of whose death at the front I have heard do I know of one instance of rebellion against the sufferings they have endured. But the spirit of sacrifice, which is the same at bottom in every one, takes, as is natural, very different forms in different people and under different circumstances. I will, if I may, in contrast with the resignation, rather passive in its austere beauty, of

the peasant from Beauce whom I was describing just now, put down what I have been hearing lately of a schoolmaster who fell, with so many others, in the offensive in Champagne.

Much has been said, and indeed deservedly, of the writers who have been mown down by the war with their future before them, standing on the very threshold of fame, some indeed already celebrated. And France in her gratitude has undertaken to redress the balance, if you accept this point of view, by the solemn and public recognitions she has given for these losses that have cost more, these sacrifices that are even more praiseworthy, than those of ordinary men. But by the side of men who have already won a name, how many others are there with talent and perhaps genius, more retiring or less favoured by circumstances, who have carried with them to the grave, to which they have been hurried by a seem-

ingly blind fate, the secret of great thoughts, the promise of wonderful discoveries! What treasures are these of intellect, of faith and of love, buried and lost for ever, were it not that God is there as we know to welcome them and enable them to bear fruit.

Intellect, faith and love: these were indeed the treasures of which I found the signs when, in the presence of the widow who asked this mournful service of me, I opened the packet containing the belongings of the young schoolmaster. It had been sent to his poor wife from the Ministry of War a few days before and she had felt it would be too much for her to touch these pathetic relics. In the knapsack in which they had put the things he carried with him there was nothing besides the absolute necessities (among which was his watch, stained with blood) but his wife's letters, a picture of her

and a group of their three babies (the eldest six years old), and a copy of the *Imitation of Christ*. His kit-bag, which had more room and was so full that it could hardly shut, held a perfect library: Corneille's and Racine's plays, Pascal, Montaigne, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, a book of algebra, a number of the *Revue de Métaphysique et Morale* and Bergson's *Matière et Mêmoire*.

What light does such a list of reading shed on the inmost thoughts of a man always exposed to death and incessantly obliged to be killing others himself or to see that they are killed! For I must not forget to say that our friend, who started as a sergeant at the beginning of the war, had soon been promoted to be a second lieutenant. He indeed was of the family of those who, under shell-fire and between two attacks, correct a scientific treatise or the proofs of their thesis for the doctor's degree. I can understand his interest

in the heroic plays of Corneille; what strikes me more is the serene spirit, free from any passion of hate, with which he must have given the order to fire as he left his mathematics or philosophy, the theorems of algebra, Pascal and Tolstoy. War that is conducted like this by men of peace with a serious-mindedness and a consciousness of danger which ennobles and spiritualizes their courage, even horrible war itself, assumes a character that almost commands our admiration, transfigured as it is by the accomplishment of duty that costs.

Our friend's reading was not for him merely a way of passing the time. He lived on it, thought of it, spoke often of it to his wife in the notes he kept for her and in the letters he wrote her, unless he was absolutely prevented, every single day. He gave her his criticisms on what he read: "I am reading Kipling's *The Light that Failed*. It is a book to cheer

one up (if that were needed), like everything of Kipling's." He told her of the books he bought if he went to a town; he asked her for certain authors, and what was sent him by her was all the more precious to him. "I have just opened *Les Provinciales*. I have to pull the book to pieces so that I can put the separate Letters in my pocket. I hate to think that the cover on which you wrote my name will perhaps get lost." He asked her to subscribe for him to the *Revue de Métaphysique*, for he was curious, he said, "to see what would happen to these abstract discussions when brought into contact with the realities of the war."

For one may be sure the trenches are not a school of dilettantism. Besides, he had never been inclined to that sort of thing; doubt, even the most sincere had never seemed to him, though he was a reader of Montaigne, to be "a soft pillow for wise heads." Even if he had for a

time lost the faith of his childhood he had honestly tried to work out for himself another doctrine of life in its place. And the moment religion, in the presence of the great lessons of death and of sacrifice, seemed to him once more to have the only key to our difficulties he returned to it and to God with the emotion of a son coming back to his father's house.

He had never sinned against the Light, and in some notes he made as a young man, when he speaks of truth, even though as yet he had not grasped it, what he writes is worth preserving:

"Life should be nothing but an eager effort, ever growing in intensity, to conquer Truth.

"The meaning of life is defined by Truth. It is better to make Truth the aim of one's life than Intellect.

"In the intellectual world nowadays, the development of the Intellect is made the supreme end of life. The greatest

happiness arises from the fullest development of one's faculties, and a man has attained the greatest happiness possible for him when he has got from his faculties the utmost they can give him. They find the chief good in the consciousness of an intense inner life. The intensity of this life means more to them than its conformity with reality.

"The word Truth, on the contrary, implies a being or thing independent of oneself, and to seek to conquer truth is to seek to live by something other than one self. The self-centredness of a life lived by Intellect, if I can put it thus, is replaced by disinterestedness, by the conquest of a good outside oneself.

"To find the end of life in Intellect is to find it in the development of one's own being; to find the supreme end of life in self-development, to fall back once more on the Superman. To find it in Truth is to wish for the development of

something external to oneself by which all can profit. Intellect only benefits the individual. Truth is for all."

The Truth which he sought so earnestly was but an empty theory ; what he needed was a truth which would govern existence and make it fruitful. " So much theory only wears us out. The necessity of living brings its obligations. The whole of life must be given to the realization of one idea, and this idea is : always more mind, more love, more will." Rather rashly, but with so fine an impulse, he proclaims his faith in the " regeneration of self by self," so as to grow continually in strength, wisdom and goodness.

But experience was to show him man's powerlessness to stand alone. We cannot here follow him through every stage of his development, but let us at least show the point he reached. To do this we shall quote from many other similar passages what

he wrote to his wife in the letter already mentioned, in which he asked her for the *Revue de Métaphysique*.

"I find strength for the battle with self in reading the *Imitation*. How often have I resolved to live only in the imitation of the life of Christ! And then, soon comes the crash; I am deeply conscious of it, I hate myself and everything. I let everything drift. What strength I would find in an imitation, even a feeble one, of this example for several weeks! Is this too much to wish? I have searched in the philosophies for men whom I could follow completely, whose life would be to me a model of wisdom. I have not found what I was seeking. But I cling desperately to Christ. I find myself stammering His name in moments of violent irritation with myself and capable of nothing more. I want also to know the goodness, the true goodness made up of understanding and forbearance with others.

Is not this the whole meaning of life, to make oneself better by one's own efforts, with the help of Christ and through suffering? Oh, I do love life since I have found this meaning in it! I love it for the struggles that I shall be called on to make, for the sufferings which life will perpetually bring me."

Humility, love of suffering, these are heights to which no one can attain all at once. At the beginning of the war our friend had not got beyond a sincere but not very inspiring resignation to the inevitable. He wrote in October, 1914:

"I am sad when I think of the dangers that lie before us and which may take us all away from those we love and for whom we live. I know that one must die cheerfully for one's country and I am sure that in the heat of action I shall act like the rest of us. But when I reflect quietly, the sacrifice which is demanded of us cannot but make me suffer. Life matters little

when one is alone, but when people are bound together as we all are, you and I and our children, it is indeed grievous to realize so clearly what one has to lose without the faintest security as to what will come after. Believers are indeed happy. How calmly they go under fire! It is nothing but a trial which purifies them and makes them ready for the Last Judgment. They are dying for their God, and this feeling is all-powerful and dominates all their thoughts; their sufferings in death are the pledge of an immediate recompense. They die with their arms outstretched to God, Who gives them life; they die transfigured. . . ."

To understand in this way the happiness of faith is already to be drawn to it. He advances to it so rapidly, under the pressure of events, that scarcely three months later he seems to have reached his journey's end. Here is a letter, dated February 6,

1915, at the same time very human and very full of religion:

"Just a line before I go to meet the chaplain of the regiment whom I have arranged to see at the church at Thann at two o'clock. Heavy clouds are rolling up from the south-east and it is raining, and we are expecting that it will be a bad job going up to relieve in the trenches. We have to go there shortly. Apparently we shall not leave Thann till nightfall. How can I tell you how miserable we are when the time comes to go up? Every one is thinking of the unknown future, of his comrades who are sleeping up there under their little white crosses. I am always thinking of the troubled souls of those men who have no ultimate hope which can diminish their horror of this brutal death. Then I turn to myself and find what infinite comfort has come to me. Old beliefs are reviving little by little in my soul, which has been crushed

by all these contradictions. I am growing like a child again, though not enough yet —humble so far as I can. I would like to get back to that simplicity and receptiveness which I love so in others. But one has to work this out in one's thoughts by oneself, and with God's help also, and it may take years."

It can truly be said that the letters written after his return to Christianity reflect the presence and working of God. His soul, already so noble, sounds a clearer and above all a happier note; one sees in it the light and the love of Christ. Here is a letter he wrote on the morning of March 27:

"This morning we heard Mass. The chaplain said it because we shall not be out of the trenches again till after Easter. He heard our confession collectively and we received the Sacrament, though we were not fasting. And now I am full of happiness and of a peace which formerly

I could not have believed possible in the face of all that may happen to us here. I am not afraid of death. I can say this to you, can't I, without making you cry? I am not afraid of it because I know that death in these circumstances, fully accepted, will be the best example for my three dear children. You will tell them this, that their fathers fall thinking of all the little children, and that those who love their fathers *must* all their lives show themselves worthy of the sacrifice. . . . I am no longer *alone*. This communion has been very blessed. But why can one not grasp for more than a few seconds the meaning of it all? Afterwards one drops back into the eternal distraction. And we, this morning especially, were obliged to leave the place, and I was not able to penetrate in a long meditation to the full, complete consciousness of the act we were accomplishing. . . . I must leave you and go to my men."

In reality his whole life from that time on became one meditation. There were no thoughts in this soul, which his letters and daily notes allow us to read uninterruptedly, save for God, for his wife and his three little children. Let us hear what he says after a murderous attack:

"I have just fulfilled a sad duty. I have had a huge trench dug and our dead buried in it. I prayed for them. I do not want to make you shudder at the thought of these dead bodies, but I ask your prayers. Pray for me too. Pray God to give me a living faith. . . .

"Kiss our dear ones, my three treasures, very tenderly for me, my life, my soul. I only send feeble embraces to you, who are my life. You do not know all that this word means for me."

I need not say that this tenderness of soul did not diminish his courage in the least. His coolness and resolution never deserted him in the face of danger and

the love of his family only heightened his love for France. He was always a good soldier and a conscientious officer, and at times he felt his sense of military and patriotic duty stirred to enthusiasm.

May 5, 5 *p.m.*—"The first joy of the war. We have just, after a bombardment lasting from nine in the morning till now, watched the triumph of our comrades of a neighbouring regiment in the same brigade. We were crouching in the bottom of the trench waiting with heavy hearts for the fatal command. Towards four o'clock the bombardment got more intense, the orders of the artillery officers behind us, shouted out at the tops of their voices, roused us. The infernal noise found a soul after a long time of heavy bombardment which seemed sterile. A great roar of joy seemed to burst with irresistible force out of all the mouths of the great guns. For a few seconds it was hell. The fire was admir-

ably directed. Shells of all calibres fell on the Boches by the score, and we saw them fleeing one by one, panic-stricken. Then we saw on the slopes west of the famous Hill 8 a company, the captain well in front, climbing boldly and without any haste, the slope so fatal to the rest of us. They reached the German trenches. We danced for joy, forgot all our weariness and our forebodings. There we all were, our stomachs empty, our hearts full of joy. What brave fellows these Savoyards are ! Our reverses have not depressed them and there they are, ready to bear the hardest and most exhausting part of to-night's labours. Now they feel that all their hard work has done something. For the first time a result has come to crown our efforts.

"It was a good day taken all in all. We were all ready to leap out of our trenches when we saw our comrades climbing the hill, the final objective of the attack.

We are still waiting for orders, but in quite a different spirit. Perhaps you felt that I was rather depressed this morning. This evening I am full of spirits."

These alternations of depression and good spirits, this struggle, always ending in victory, of the unflinching spirit with the weak flesh, that is at bottom the true life of our defenders, a heroism of the will more noble and more enduring than any fire of the imagination could be. Its grandeur shines out especially in the most trying times when all is suffering, danger and uncertainty. As I must make some selection from these letters which reveal so much I will now quote only those of quite the last days. They were written in the middle of the offensive in Champagne. Tenderness, horror, enthusiasm, the spirit of sacrifice, all the most intense expressions of life, meet and clash there in a sense like the armies themselves in the shock of the frightful battle.

October 2, 1915.—"Do you know how deeply I love you? Less and less can I do without you. You never leave me now. And to think that this war might never have happened! You understand what I mean. We might not perhaps have realized our happiness without this *horrible* war. It will have had this amount of good for us. It will have taught us to recognize our happiness. I think of all of you, my darlings, every day, all the time. I only think how I can make you happier, make your life better and more beautiful, make you feel all its beauty and all its value, I who see all the horror and the hatefulness of this state contrary to nature which is war.

"My poor darlings, how terrible it is! What ghastly sights there are! My God, how horrible! And yet it all makes me love life—but life with you, spent in continued hard work, a life simple, well-ordered and well-filled. Oh, how I shall

love this life which you will make it possible for me to live, my dearest! How happy I am to have you!

"I must leave you. I am writing to you from the bottom of a German dug-out cut in the chalk; a little cat from God knows where mews at my side. The smell of dead bodies comes from every direction.

"Good-bye, my dear ones. A kiss for each of you."

October 3.—"Here we are waiting for the great event. How I should love to see it succeed! With what joy would we all march then! Do not be afraid for me; men don't fall when they are carried away by such a torrent of enthusiasm. How eagerly our men will march if we are successful. You will not be anxious even if you have no news for several days. What will that matter compared with the great event, if we ever have the joy of seeing it?"

October 5, 1915.—"What a life we are living! If I come out of this with sound nerves I need never be afraid of anything again. What a terrific noise! Shells bursting by hundreds and thousands all round. And in what a setting! The trenches battered down, chalky and dry; and there is an imperceptible dust that gets into one's every pore. No water to wash in; no sleep for ten days. We eat when we can, and with it all I am very well. I have moments of oppression, but it does not last. The strong machine gets the upper hand.

"For thirteen months, but especially for the last eight days I have been learning here how to live—for this action, through the immensity of the total effort and of the individual efforts needed from every one, has nothing in common with what has been done up till now.

"I am learning patience (not resignation, that is a feeling that has a little weakness

in it), and the worship of force rightly used. I am learning to suffer without noticing it. I am learning the value of the accumulated effort of months in view of a desired result, and it is by this, above all, that I wish to profit in the little world I love so dearly.

"I am learning all this, and many other things which I cannot tell you for lack of time to write, or to think it all out.

"Well, be perfectly happy about me. I am very well and I hope that all this will end for the best for the country and for me.

"Take great care of the children. May they think of their father who lives for them and by them.

"P.S.—Don't send any books till I ask for more. I will be sure to write in three days."

Next day, October 6, our friend was "mortally wounded," as a glorious men-

tion in the army order was to say, "leading his section to the attack with the greatest courage and most splendid dash."

Mentions in the army order give the right, as is known, to the *Croix de Guerre*. The Government of the Republic had the good inspiration to decide that the decorations of soldiers who fell on the field of honour were to be given to their family. Accordingly, six months later our hero's widow was told that the *Croix*, so well deserved, would be given her at a military parade in the *Cour d'Honneur* at the *Invalides*. Her first impulse was to stay away from a ceremony which would bring back her grief with all the old intensity again. But I persuaded her to go there with her children and to let her eldest son, whom I would accompany if she wished it, receive the decoration. She quickly saw all the educational value this might have for her dear children.

It was a fine sight. In the most beautiful of the courts of this palace, built by Louis XIV for the soldiers of France, in front of the Dome beneath which Napoleon lies sleeping, several companies of the soldiers of the Third Republic stood under arms, among them some men who had been—and no more need be said—at Dixmude. Thus all that is great in France met together; the greatness of the past and that, fully its equal, of the present. The April sky was stormy, like our inmost hearts; sunshine and violent showers followed one another, telling at once of our glory and our tears.

It was in a brilliant interval that, after the decoration of the wounded officers and soldiers, the child and I went out into the middle of the court, with other relations in mourning. The general walked past us, handing the decorations to the mother, widow or orphan, chosen by the family to represent it; the latter were

very much in the majority ; it was fitting that the France of the future should also be there in the persons of these children, with serious and already resolute faces, to receive the sacred torch and vow that it should never be quenched. The national spirit appeared to me with an almost physical reality when the general, in this palace full of memories of the great King and the great Emperor, distributed the orders in the name of the Republic and pressed the hand of the orphan whom I presented to him, and then mine. But I had an even more vivid sense of it when, after the ceremony, there marched past us with so proud a step, behind the flag riddled with bullets and in uniforms worn in so glorious a cause, the three companies who had come from the front and were returning there.

And all this happened in the eighth week of the Verdun battle.

Towards the end of the day I went to my friends' house for a few moments. The baby girl of two, who knows no cares, greeted me with cries of delight; the little boy of three and a half wanted to show me "father's *Croix*" once more; the eldest, who often thinks of his father but is unwilling to speak of him, was reading the Gospels. The mother gave me her hand in silence. I offered to bless the precious decoration for her, and when I was about to return it to her, doubly sacred, she hid her face in her hands. Her two sons threw themselves on her neck: "Don't cry, mother, don't cry." I bade her think once more of the noble farewell which had been found addressed to her among the notes of the dear husband she had lost:

August 23, 1915.

My Dearest,—

In the uncertainty which hangs over our life to-day I want to kiss you

once more and say a few words to you.

First I want to tell you that I confessed to-day. I am going to the attack with a quiet conscience and a strong heart I know what I have to lose in you and our darling children. I am offering the sacrifice of my life, not light-heartedly, but deliberately, with the conviction that it will save you all whom I love so dearly. You will tell this to the children, and later on they will try to understand.

RICHARD NELVILLE HALL

IX

RICHARD NELVILLE HALL: AN AMERICAN WHO DIED FOR FRANCE

(*A Sermon preached in the American Hospital on January* 2, 1916)

My Friends,—

The memory of our beautiful midnight Mass is, I am sure, still in all your minds, and your hearts like mine are still moved at the recollection of it. There will long remain before your eyes the picture of those rows of worshippers and supplicants, crowded round the lowly altar where our Saviour once again repeated the mystery of His Birth and His Redemption. Sick and blind they came, the brave fellows, suffering from every kind of wound, and with them, leading, supporting, and carrying them, those who are devoting them-

selves to healing or alleviating their distress. As you said to me the day after, one could imagine oneself back in the days of the Apostles. And indeed, when at the time of the Communion, by the hands of the priest who knelt before the stretchers, Jesus was pleased to touch the lips and enter the hearts of the sick men lying there, it was more, and better, than a reminder of the scenes in Galilee—it was the very thing itself. And as this moving sight rises before your eyes when you close them, so in moments of silence your ears hear once more the beautiful singing of our *Minuit, Chrétiens*, the *Gloria in Excelsis*, "*See, Amid the Winter Snow*," and the *Noël de France*, which so grandly summons the great army of our defenders to the Cradle of the Heavenly Child:

Arise, ye living . . .
Arise, ye wounded . . .
Arise, ye dead . . .

While in this chapel and in all the

churches of Christendom men were praying devoutly; while beneath the stars of a wonderfully serene night the angels' song rose from earth to heaven in the very words in which it once came down from heaven to earth, "Glory to God and peace to men," do you know the sorrowful and glorious event which in a land, itself sorrowful and glorious, set the seal of honour and mourning, this very Christmas Eve, on the Red Cross of our ambulances?

Imagine yourself in Alsace, in the blood-stained region of Hartmansweilerkopf, just on that frontier line which is being pushed forward, you know at what cost, but which still is being pushed forward unfalteringly, never again to recede, in its true direction towards Colmar and Strasbourg and towards the blue line of the Rhine.

It is the evening of December 24.

Thinking that possibly men would stop killing one another for a little while on the night that Jesus was born, the officers gave orders to the Ambulance sections to evacuate the wounded from the field dressing-stations. One of our young ambulance-drivers, an American student of twenty-one, set out alone in his car to carry out his orders. He went on his way, as he had started, quite unafraid (an American does not know what fear is) but perhaps not without a slight feeling of sadness, his thoughts doubtless going far away across the sea to the house he loved, where in other years he and his family celebrated Christmas together.[1] And at such recollections his heroic soul became again that of a happy

[1] He had written to his parents on Nov. 11: "It is rather nice to know I can be happy in the face of some hard and dirty work, even with the privations . . . *I am not talking or thinking about Christmas. I don't dare.*"

child—he was filled with innocent thoughts, unuttered prayers and religious aspirations. Then it was that God bent on him a look of love, and seeing him perfectly ready for a higher life no longer laid a restraining hand on the murderous forces which the madness of men had let loose; He allowed a hostile shell to take its course and drop on the lonely car and in an instant cut short the mortal life of him He had chosen.

At about four in the morning another of our drivers who was passing by found him in the middle of the wreckage of his motor, wounded in the head, the leg, and the side, but with his face untouched and showing no trace of any suffering, still with the same kindly smile, the same look of frankness and confidence which all you his comrades had learnt to love during the six months he had been one of you. So it happened that on Christmas Eve, 1915, in the midst of the great war, Richard

Nelville Hall of Ann Arbor, Michigan, met a glorious and peaceful death in the cause of France in the redeemed part of our own land of Alsace.

It is in this sacred ground that they buried him, in a tiny cemetery where numbers of our soldiers lie sleeping side by side. His body was wrapped in the Tricolour of France, decorated with the *Croix de Guerre*. There, in the presence of his comrades, the detachment which paid him the last honours, and the Alsatian women who promised to care for his grave, the chief doctor of the Hospital of Moosch pronounced this eulogy. You will, I am sure, be glad to hear it:

"At the Hospital 3/58, where we have had the opportunity, during months of life in common, to appreciate the endurance, courage and devotion of our American comrades, we have learnt to feel the sincerest friendship for them. And among them all, Richard Hall won our

esteem by his modesty, his gentleness, and his readiness to help.

" He had just left Dartmouth College,[1] and in the generosity of his young heart he came to France full of eagerness to help her, freely offering his services on the battlefields of Alsace to our gallant soldiers who have been wounded while fighting for their beloved country.

" He has died as a ' Knight of Charity,' as an American, in the accomplishment of a work of kindness and of Christian love. To those dear to him in his own country, to his bereaved parents, to his eldest brother, who is with us bearing his grief so stoically, I would express my respect and our very sincere and deeply-felt sorrow.

" Richard Hall, you will lie here under the shadow of the French flag by the side

[1] The motor-ambulance which Hall was driving was one of the two presented by his fellow-students at Dartmouth College.

of these gallant men. Your courage is as great as theirs; you have a full right to your place in their sacred ranks. It is only your body, so gloriously wounded, that is being hidden from our sight. Your soul has gone on high in search of God. Your memory is here, in our hearts. The French do not forget. Richard Hall, farewell!"

And now, members of the Ambulance Corps, if you ask me why Hall was ready to sacrifice his young life so full of promise, why he preferred to spend himself in devoted labour, to risk his life in a perilous enterprise, rather than to live in peace and comfort in the enjoyment of the pleasure and success that would have been most deservedly his, I will bid you look in your own hearts for the answer: the high motives which inspired his conduct direct yours also; your thoughts and feelings are the same as his, just as you do every

day what he used to do, and if need be, will die as he has died.

To you, his comrades, who have met in prayer for him before this altar, I have nothing more to say. But you are not alone. Our dear wounded friends are here with you. They have come in a spirit of gratitude and brotherly sympathy, and they will love to hear a word in praise of Hall, and, in him, of many other Americans equally generous.

Soldiers of France, do you know why this young hero came of his own accord to offer us his strength, his love, and his life? First of all, do not doubt it, because he loved France. For France, loved by oppressed countries for her efforts to free them, is loved also by countries that are free, because all in some degree are indebted to her for their liberty. America has not forgotten the help she had from us in the eighteenth century when she won her independence; and I found when

I was over there that the names of no foreigners were hailed with such affection as those of Lafayette and Rochambeau. Indeed, they are not thought of as foreigners there, but as fellow-citizens, their names inseparable from that of Washington, the father of his country; and from the Atlantic to the Rocky Mountains it was enough, even now, only to mention them to raise not merely millions of dollars for the service of France, but thousands of nurses, doctors, ambulance-drivers, and members of the Foreign Legion. Since to-day we have the opportunity of unburdening our hearts to them, let us, in God's presence, make our true feelings known to them and tell them in no uncertain terms that if they are grateful to France for what she did for them, we in our turn are well aware of what they are doing for us to-day.

France does not stand alone in this war of wars, in this unparalleled crisis in the

history of mankind. Richard Hall came not only for us, but also, as all of you have come, for the Allies, for all the nations who, at a cost of suffering which you know well, are defending justice, progress and the liberty of the world. He knew, and his father, a teacher in a great university in the United States, could have told him had it been necessary, but he knew well that if any deliberate and criminal policy of aggression was responsible for the outbreak of the war it was not to be found among the Serbians, ready to sacrifice everything except their honour to avert the disaster; not among the Russians, who only mobilized to protect their brother Slavs from a mighty neighbour; not in France, who did not for a moment debate her duty as a faithful ally; not indeed in Belgium, who chose to risk national existence rather than to forfeit her honour; not in England either, who answered the infamous proposals made her in these words: "If it is a question of

life and death for you to dishonour your signature, so is it for us to honour ours." Our young American knew, too, that the progress of humanity was not bound up with the triumph of Prussian militarism or the mediaeval polity of the Hapsburgs, not even with the predominance of the Bulgarian or Turkish ideals.

It was then in a sort of crusade on behalf of the right that Richard Hall came to take his share, a share that certainly would mean arduous work and which eventually demanded the sacrifice of his eager young life. It was a true knight in the person of this young American who set out to war, journeying from the distant shores of Lake Michigan to the gates of ancient Lutetia and to the famous mountains of the Vosges. But I am wrong in saying he set out to war. For he did not come to kill; he came, as did many of you here, to save and to heal. He did not come to menace

the lives of others; he came only to risk his own.

But he risked it gladly, without hesitation and without regret. Who knows but that he had forebodings on that holy Christmas Eve? Only four days earlier one of his comrades had been wounded in the arm by a bursting shell. On that solemn day God may well have spoken to him, and said: "My son, before setting out once more in search of your wounded brothers, tell me if you are ready to die for them? If you are not, do not stir from your rest to-night."

And there is no doubt that our friend would have answered, as you would all have done in his place:

"My life, O Father, is in Thy hands. Send me whither Thou wilt."

And he would have set out, more serious perhaps than usual, but with a deeper happiness, his spirit stirred to a still finer enthusiasm.

Who, my friends, is He that speaks in our hearts, giving such stern orders, compelling our obedience? Who says to us: "Leave your wealth, your pleasures, your family, and all the things you hold dear," and we leave them?—"Give your labour, your exertions, your health," and we give them?—"Sacrifice your life," and we sacrifice it?

Whose voice is it? Surely it is His alone Who has the right to speak thus, because life and all that we have are His since He is the giver of them. It is His alone Who knows the secrets of our hearts and the words which move them. It is the voice of Him Who alone knows whither our sacrifice is leading us. He knows that these sufferings, this seeming death, are but a small price to pay, though we do not think of it in this calculating way, for boundless happiness and life without end. Has He not told us in His Gospel: "He that wishes to come after me let him deny himself

and take up his cross and follow me"; and again: "Whosoever shall seek his soul will lose it, and he that loseth his soul shall find it"? And what is this but to say that the secret of the highest life and of the heavenly joys is to leave oneself behind, to come out of oneself, and so to devote oneself to others and to God?

Such are the words, my friends, that in these terrible yet glorious times, these days of death and renown, you are all worthy to hear.

What is left for me to ask of you in the name of God whose minister I am? One thing only, with which I will stop. It is that once having climbed to such heights, you will never descend again to the level of selfish and cowardly passions; but that all, soldiers, ambulance-drivers, doctors and nurses, having received the great baptism of heroism in this War, will be worthy of it for the rest of your lives,

by faith and courage, by purity and devotion—to sum it all up in few words, by your love of God and of your fellowmen.

PART II

REFLECTIONS

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

X

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

November 29, 1915.—I had a friend who died yesterday at the age of ninety-three. Up to the last her intelligence remained alert and unclouded and her heart, which was even greater than her mind, never lost its warmth and generosity. And now the light of her presence has gone from us. The reverence which I felt for her age and the beauty of her soul she felt also for my priestly office, and there was an acknowledged warmth of affection in our mutual respect.

Apart from the fact that in her kind-heartedness she felt drawn to me there was nothing, one would have thought, to bring us together. Not only was she born in another faith, but she had lost, or at least thought she had, any form of

belief. By making for herself ideas of prayer and the miraculous which were very crude and so childish as to offend her highly cultivated mind, she had found her notion of the supernatural in flagrant contradiction with experience; and without inquiring more deeply she had thrown it overboard at once for the sake of consistency. This is often the final result of religious education of a type one would think the strictest and most stable. In such cases it seems as if belief will stop at nothing, as if the mind will never humble itself enough. Everything goes very well until the mind revolts and no longer believes in anything. I am not sure if this was the case with my friend in her childhood and early youth; but I am afraid the Bible was not explained to her rightly then. In any case, when I first knew her, fifteen years ago, she had long felt difficulties about the Providence of God.

She did not think that God was either

good or just ; and as she could not prevent herself from thinking about Him, she spent half her time in denying His existence and the other half in reproaching Him. At one and the same time she thought it absurd that the Absolute and Infinitive Being should concern Himself with the details of this world, and also made Him responsible for all the evil in it. Full of compassion herself for the sufferings of humanity, she thought that God must be terribly cruel not to put a stop to them, and did not understand that it could be possible to love Him.

It is easy to imagine the feelings of a soul such as this at the sight of the sorrows of the present time. Her heart had never lost its youth and tenderness and was almost broken by it ; her mind, which had more force than logic, or to speak truly, more passion than discernment, was filled with more and more indignation against the Author, though He should not exist,

of so cruel a universe; He ought, she held, either not to have created it, or, having created it, to hold Himself responsible for it and not leave it a prey to such horrors.

And then when her anger had spent itself, she confessed to not being sure of her case and took refuge, either because she was softened or because she had lost heart, in trying to be a sceptic; but that did not last long, and at the first opportunity she reverted to the discussion of the great problems that haunted her. Every serious conversation with her ended there. Though she always gave a warm welcome to all her friends, she preferred the society of those who were preoccupied with religious questions, and towards the end of her life she loved nothing better than perfectly frank and intimate talks with them.

My efforts to answer her problems and her questions gave rise to the following notes. I read them to her when last we

met, only a week before her death, and she said that they satisfied her. It is true that they bear specially on her particular difficulties and that she recognized in them echoes of past discussions. But at the same time, and this is why I venture to publish them, they may give some answer, if but a partial one, to the perplexities that torment so many souls. May they shed some rays of light and consolation on them as on my aged friend. Three times on the night of her death she had the *Pater Noster* said at her bedside, herself joining in with failing voice. She died, the dear rebel, calling God "our Father," and saying to Him, "Thy will be done."

All are agreed that moral goodness constitutes the highest form of being that we know, and without it the universe would be nothing but a vast machine. But moral goodness implies choice on the part of a free will. God wishes the crowning point of His

creation to be self-determining beings. He places them in the world of existence, as free as possible from bias, so to say. Then He urges and helps them, if they wish it, to follow the ideal that He has set before them, but refrains from forcing them to pursue it, for any constraint would put it out of their reach. If it were compulsory, moral goodness would no longer be moral goodness. Hence our greatness, which has in it something divine: we owe to ourselves, in part, what we are; and to stand by oneself is the first attribute of divinity. Hence, the truest reason for humility, for this sublime power is a gift. Hence, too, the truest reason for self-distrust, for we are always liable to misuse this power. Our greatest strength, our greatest wisdom, lie in prayer, in resting our weakness upon God. The effective help that we receive from Him in answer does not then involve the loss of our merit, for we freely asked it. Neither God alone nor man alone can bring

virtue into being—to do this man's will and God's co-operation are needed. But man by himself can do evil.

This life's moral trial is a dangerous if a glorious one: we have to win the final possession of the Supreme Good by an act which is really ours and really free, and this though that Good is not apparent to us in all its splendour and attractiveness, and though we are capable of preferring evil and even tempted to do so. Under these conditions sin comes from us who freely prefer it to good; it does not come from God Who, by His teaching and His grace, leads us away from it as much as He can without violating our free will. Every form of evil comes from this sin which He forbids. How then dare you reproach Him with it?

That every form of evil comes from sin is the fundamental teaching of Christianity. It is also a fact of experience which can, at least in part, be verified. Put an end to

all vice, to the varied forms of selfishness and to the pursuit of unlawful pleasure ; imagine mankind full of justice, gentleness and temperance, and how different would be the conditions of life !

But let us limit our inquiry to the evil peculiar to to-day, which perhaps has not its equal in history ; let us only consider the terrible evil of the present war and of its consequences. Does it follow, this war, from obedience to the laws established by God, or from their transgression ? Such a question need only be put to be answered. It would not be pleasant to dwell on the conditions which brought it about. But that I may not seem to be shirking them. I will mention two, one which concerns ourselves and the other which refers to our chief enemy. Can one believe that Germany, who is responsible for the war, would have thought of it without her spirit of covetousness, and above all her monstrous pride,

which will destroy her in God's sight as in the sight of man? And on the other hand, can we believe that her temptation to have recourse to arms would have been so strong if she had seen before her a France her equal in population, as would have been the case without the crime on our part of intentionally limiting the number of births? Can one see now the inconsistency of this objection?—"How, if God exists, and is good and just, could He wish, or even allow, such a mass of evils, so terrible a war?"

Away with this blasphemy! All that has caused the war was forbidden by God, and yet we lay it to His charge! Not only were the causes of this war not willed by God: He willed, He ordained, quite otherwise—charity, justice, chastity, humility. He does not permit in the true sense of the word permit, He utterly forbids men to give themselves over to the corresponding vices. He only leaves us free to do so

because without freedom there would be no moral goodness, and without moral goodness there would be nothing great or fine left in this world. But at the same time He bids us shun sin, and the war is a consequence of sin; He urges us with threats and promises, in the name of our own happiness and of His love. Those who are responsible for the war are the rebels against God, the transgressors of His laws, the sinners. It is for them to humble themselves and to beat their breasts in horror at the evil they have brought about. As for God, the Sovereign Good, He is, in the words of the Psalmist, justified in all His ways.

THE FRUITS OF SACRIFICE

XI

THE FRUITS OF SACRIFICE

Sacrifice, in the Christian conception, is a source of new life, not a work of death. He who renounces himself goes on to something better; he emerges from his ancient state to pass into another, higher, more complete and more beautiful state. "He that loseth his life shall find it." On the other hand, to cling tenaciously to the lower state when the time has come to renounce it, is not only to fail in growth but to fall into decay, to decline in strength and to destroy oneself. "He that findeth his life shall lose it."

It is not a question, then, of annihilation but of growth, of re-birth into a transcendent order, of the choice of the greater

rather than the less. Let us consider the supreme sacrifice. A soldier dies of his own free will for his country. What is it in reality that he renounces? A transitory life, and one of which he would have been ashamed if he had kept it at the price of cowardice. To what does his act lead? To a moral satisfaction which, even if it must be cut short, would be worth more to him than a long life of mediocrity.

Even if it must be cut short. But it continues! What sort of a world would it be where the conscious and free will, the highest thing that we know, as soon as it had committed the crime of attaining perfection, would immediately, and for this very reason, be plunged again into endless nothingness? The highest development of human personality would end in its destruction; its noblest effort would hasten its disappearance! And it is the supporters of the theory of evolution who uphold this view of death, who believe in

this sudden arrest of powers in their full vigour!

But our heroes do not believe it, not even those who imagine they do; this false notion would be contradicted by their very acts. To sacrifice one's life in order to live more intensely is to affirm the existence of another life. In the fertile depths of their subconsciousness lives, as the moving-spring of their actions, the religious and spiritual faith of their ancestors, a faith in the Absolute and the Eternal. It is in this faith that their ideal is rooted; the flower would have quickly withered if the roots had lost their hold. The idea that they have of their sacrifice and of the truths that it implies may be very imperfect; but the sacrifice is there, none the less, in its reality, in all its uncomprehended riches. Their act is more fruitful than they realize and they will reap more than they imagine they have sown.

Whether they are zealous in the faith or

unbelievers stirred, without realising it, by an inner and supernatural grace, it is through the love of the Good, through the love of God, that they have all offered themselves. Good does not lead to Evil, to nothingness; and God does not betray those who give themselves for Him. The height of perfection which they attain at the moment of their sacrifice, far from vanishing in one bright flash, is perpetuated in eternity. Lifted suddenly and easily above the material world, they no longer have to fear danger and contamination, they see their destiny fixed at the point to which it was carried by a wonderful impulse, in the possession, the perfect enjoyment, of infinite Light and Love.

Nor is it to them alone that their noble death discloses sources of life eternal. As it is the cause of their greatness and their happiness, so it is of ours. It has not only saved for us our earthly country and possessions, but our ideal itself. As they are

lifted to such heights before our eager sight they reveal to us, freed from all obscurity, the end which we also must pursue. And the great law of sacrifice which we were beginning to forget finds again its splendour, its divine attraction in the radiant example of their sacrifice.

THE PLACE OF SELF-SACRIFICE IN THE COMMON LIFE

XII

THE PLACE OF SELF-SACRIFICE IN THE COMMON LIFE

One of my friends, a sociologist, to whom I had submitted some of the ideas in the preceding chapters on the problems of evil and of sacrifice, advised me to study these questions from his particular point of view as well. I readily agreed, on the condition that he would direct my inquiries, and the following are roughly the considerations which I reached under his guidance.

The evils from which the world is suffering at the present day are not simply brought about by a few perverted or ill-regulated wills. One can see the germ of them in the ruling ideas and customs of many years past, even though the cause

of their breaking out at one particular time rather than another may well lie in these evil wills. The social organism is governed by laws which we may choose to respect or no; but their rewards and punishments, once our free act is decided, follow without our consent. Whoever has observed the phenomena of this nature systematically sees clearly that they demand for their proper operation certain conditions, due some to hygienic and economic, some to moral causes. Now among these last, which are far from being the least important, there is one in particular which it is dangerous to disregard, and our contemporaries have paid to it too little attention: that is that the life of the nation as a whole can only prosper in proportion as the citizens each contribute their share to it, and at the cost of personal self-denial. The ties which connect even the private conduct of the individual to the good of the whole are not sufficiently

recognized. Yet they are innumerable and very intimate. How many actions in which the individual thinks he has only himself to consider affect social well-being in the highest degree? The sociologist no less than the philosopher and the theologian believes in the solidarity of mankind; and the consequences of our words, nay even our desires and thoughts, are felt indefinitely by our fellow-men. One could easily give any number of examples: for instance, the tradesman who opens his shop on Sundays and thinks he is leaving his rivals free to shut theirs. Or take a case perhaps not so obvious, that of a healthy, well-to-do individual who with no high motive, no other reason than his own pleasure, decides not to marry. He thinks that it is entirely his own affair and has nothing to do with society. All the same this act of his is destructive of the fabric of social life and harmful in many ways. We do not wish here to discuss the

consequences to morality which his selfish resolution too often brings on himself and on others. Is it not clear, on other counts, that, for the sake of his own advantage and to the loss of others, he is disturbing the economic equilibrium? How are those who are burdened with a large family to compete with him in work or business? Will they not see wages and salaries kept, because of him and others like him, at a rate which represents comfort for a single man but which leaves them with their family of five or six in straightened circumstances, and almost in want? Not only, then, will he himself not bring up children for his country, but he will lead others to refuse to give her the proper number. In these terrible years, if he is over military age, he will have a fine chance of preaching heroism. He will doubtless eloquently exalt his country; but it would not take many citizens such as he to bring her on the road to destruction.

The individual must, then, through a profound sense of social discipline, and even of self-sacrifice, cheerfully accept his part in the common task, and resolutely set the good of the community before his own interest or pleasure. Can one say that this needful subordination of personal advantage to the welfare of the State was normal, or even common, in our modern state of society? Were not the majority of citizens, on the contrary, engaged in making what they could for themselves out of the common patrimony, and did not even those who still had some scruples about the rights of their neighbours think that anything was permissible as soon as it was a question of the rights of the city or the nation?

Do not let us dwell upon this bad state of things, nor, as would be easy enough, look for examples that are only too prominent. But what we may say, and it is a sign of a still more deeply rooted evil, is

that these tendencies to prefer private interest to common good, to sacrifice society to the individual, had passed from the world of practice, where they might have been considered exceptional failings, into the world of theory, where men made a point of defending them, and even into the world of law, where there seemed to be a desire to raise them to the dignity of an ideal principle. If, for example, legislation was proposed for the regulation of the manufacture and sale of spirits, what had to be safeguarded was not the morality, nor the health, nor even the sanity of the public, but the complete liberty of drinkers and the profit of traders in drunkenness. Or if the object was the revision of the marriage laws, it was no longer, as one ought to have expected, with a view to making the family more fruitful, more stable and more vigorous, but, strange to say, to uphold against the unquestionable right of society the pretended right of in-

dividuals who had made unhappy marriages—and this usually through their own fault—to discard their obligations and to look for new chances of success in another union. Let the common good take its chance; the great thing is to allow every one, as they say, to live his own life.

But, God knows, the assistance of the law was not needed to aggravate the evil. The weakening of moral belief and aspirations was quite enough by itself. Nothing could be more vulgar than the plan of life which was followed by an ever-growing number of our contemporaries. Their one ideal seemed to be to achieve material comfort with the least amount of work and the greatest possible rapidity. They were only interested in public affairs in so far as they could make something out of them. Far from looking on society as a fresh source of duties, they saw in it only an opportunity of ridding themselves

of burdensome obligations. There had to be a skilfully devised system of organizations to secure pensions for every one, to compensate them for accidents, to provide education for children, doweries for daughters, medical care for the sick, for invalids and old people, and in a word to free every one from anxiety about others and to allow him to save time and resources for the sole pursuit of his own happiness.

I do not say that everything in such a plan is equally to be condemned; one must, for instance, welcome anything that does away with the risk of poverty and destitution to those who are defeated in the struggle of life. But to try by the clever machinery of common action to escape all private duties destroys our dignity; for this depends upon self-control and the personal contribution we make to the advantages by which we ourselves are going to benefit. Men, hoping to free

themselves from cares, would merely deprive themselves of the purest sources of life.

At the same time, and experience justifies us in saying so, this hope is a sheer delusion. Once the idea of sacrifice is given up, unbridled selfishness shows itself more fruitful in evils than the law is in remedies ; and the remedies themselves are no sooner exploited by this selfishness than they aggravate the needs till it becomes impossible to satisfy them. If, for instance, a law is made, and with good reason, for old age pensions in consideration of the numbers of working people that are destitute of resources at the end of their lives ; as soon as it is put into practice such masses of people count on it and give up the costly virtue of thrift that the State finds itself overwhelmed, and is obliged to fix the pensions at a rate which is no longer adequate. There were in France, in about 1884, a certain number of

people unhappy in their married life. To free them from the life of sacrifice imposed on them divorce was instituted by law. And now from year to year statistics show us an alarming increase in unhappy marriages; now, after thirty years of this system, we have (this is the proportion of the number of divorces now compared with those at the beginning) five times as many husbands and wives who cannot live together.

Every wrong law, every misdirected effort, every arrangement of life which goes contrary to the moral law inevitably entails suffering. A society in which there is more than a certain proportion of self-centred individuals is on the way to disintegration and degradation, and those very people who wished to enjoy themselves at its expense are infected by the disease. The issue, though it is not always immediate, is none the less certain.

Even though it has gone very much

astray a human society can live for some time on the slowly accumulated fruits of ancestral virtues; but one fine day this reserve is exhausted and the lean years come. It is realized that there is a dearth of temperance, and hence of health; a dearth of loyalty, and hence of confidence; a dearth of disinterestedness, and hence of honesty in public affairs; a dearth of family life, and hence of children, of the strength to meet the competition of neighbours in time of peace, and in times of peril to thwart the covetous feelings which lead to war.

Had we come to this? The answer is to be found in events.

We did not get there all at once. The French who restricted the number of their children to three in 1850, to two in 1875, to one only towards the end of the century, did not imagine that they would let thousands of them be killed in 1915; those who impressed on us the love of pleasure

whatever the cost, together with the horror of responsibilities, did not realize that by this they were weakening our country and were marking it out as a tempting prey to greedy rivals. The Germans, who, on the other hand, by a sort of diabolical coincidence were little by little growing intoxicated with pride, materialism and contempt for the rest of the world, did not imagine that one day this would lead them to provoke in their madness so many other countries that they themselves would thus find ruin and humiliation. . . . It is not my business to examine the consciences of all the other nations in the ordeal of war, and I know that there are some who cannot be reproached with a responsibility for it, however remote; but I feel justified in saying that there would have been some chance of avoiding the war, or at least that it would not have been either so terribly widespread, or so long, or so appalling, in a Europe that was more moral

and more Christian, where the individuals had each kept the feeling for common interests and rights. The great mass of misery before which the world is aghast to-day is only the explosion, in the world of international politics, of the disintegrating forces which have been at work for the last half-century—or rather the last century and a half—in the internal life of nations as well as in their mutual relations. Society, though slumbering peacefully, was none the less on the brink of the abyss.

If the thunderclaps now sounding in our ears are not enough to waken us, we are deaf indeed. And we are probably destined to hear still more. After the difficulties of war, the difficulties of peace. . . . I will venture to say that unless there is what we call in the language of religion a real "conversion," or as soldiers would say a complete change of front, modern society will during the next few decades go through a period of suffering the extent,

severity and duration of which it is hard to foretell, though the two years we have just lived through seem already to be giving a fair idea of it.

Perhaps in society in general as in our individual bodies pain is necessary to draw attention to disease, and has to be more cruel and sharply felt as the disease itself is more deep-seated. Suffering, through which nations become conscious of their maladies, is, if they consent, but the beginning of their cure. I am convinced that it will be so with the disasters of the present day, and that men, learning more by these experiences of the true conditions of their happiness, will return to that way of life which alone justifies them in expecting it, to the careful observance of those virtues without which neither the prosperity of the community nor the progress of the individual can be established. They will recognize that

happiness, even here on earth, is in the end bound up with justice, and that Christ's teaching, " Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you," states not only a rule of spiritual salvation, but one of the most fruitful laws governing the social order established by man. Good citizens will be numerous enough and devoted enough; they will, thanks to these very disasters, win influence enough over the mind of the nation to restore to it the sense of the superior realities of the moral life, the conviction that these are essential, and the will that can make them triumph.

Since we are for the moment limited to the domain of sociology it is not our place to say from what sources each individual must draw support for his spiritual strength. But it is within our province to assert that a society cannot live or prosper in those conditions of selfishness and vulgarity on which we had apparently

chosen to build ours. And the victory which is bound to come must not make us disregard the urgent need for reform. In spite of flatterers who will only talk about our good qualities the triumph of arms will not, by itself, have put an end to all the evils and dangers that beset us. Let us have no illusions as to their existence or extent; nor, on the other hand, any illusions as to the proper remedies. No adequate remedies will be invented by the economists, nor contrived by clever legislators; no machinery can be found that will free us from the necessity for moral effort. When peace returns the name of saviours and restorers of their country will not be deserved by the men who know how to set on foot once more by ingenious and scientific processes the finances, commerce, agriculture and industry of the country—in a word, to provide what is urgently needed for material welfare; the true saviours will be those

who will give back to the mind, heart and soul of this great French nation a doctrine of life rich and powerful enough to enable every individual, in normal times no less than in times of war, to admit the necessity of regulating his conduct by the needs of the common good and frankly to accept the sacrifices which in consequence will be demanded of him. On this condition—and the heroism and noble bearing which have won for France the admiration of the world are our guarantee that it will be fulfilled—on this condition the great ordeal will bear fruit worthy of its cost.

ATONEMENT

XIII

ATONEMENT

You tell me that your whole soul revolts against admitting an active intervention of God with no other object than to let loose punishment and, as if in revenge, to make those who had sinned against Him suffer; and that on still stronger grounds you refuse to believe that innocent people can be punished for those who are the actual criminals. This whole doctrine of atonement seems to you to be a legacy of savage times, a survival of anthropomorphism unworthy of the true God and of the Gospel, unworthy even of the humane feelings of the present day.

Put in this exaggerated form and in terms like these, which certainly to a great extent falsify and misrepresent it, I can understand that the doctrine of

atonement conflicts at once with your feelings and your reason, and even with your belief in a God Who is good and just. We shall try later on to reach a more accurate idea of atonement. But first tell me if at the opposite pole to the system you condemn, which one may call the uncompromising doctrine of atonement, there is not another conception equally extreme, doing just as much injury to your innermost feelings and to your notion of an equitable order of things.

Do you admit that evil can be done and leave no results which have to be redressed ? Think of those crimes which are most revolting to man's conscience ; think of those which particularly offend your own conscience. God knows the present war will provide you with enough instances. Do you think it fitting that these misdeeds should bring no consequences with them but the misery of their victims ? Do you not rather feel that the true order of things

must be restored, and that this is impossible without redress, without justice being done? Now it is here that we have the whole foundation of the doctrine of atonement.

It is not in the least essential that Providence should go out of its way expressly to requite individual sinners, nor that it should devise against them and with a view to their punishment an act which would otherwise have remained undone. I do not deny the possibility of such intervention, but I think that it is very difficult to prove it, that it is rarely apparent and that normally the case is quite different. What does happen, as a matter of fact, in our ordinary trials, and especially in those which touch nearly all of us to-day? Sometimes, thanks to the regular play of the natural forces ordained by God, but diverted by us from their true object; sometimes, and that more frequently, through the direct fault of men

in rebellion against the laws of God, misfortunes arise which He could not avert without Himself disturbing the order of the world or putting constraint upon our free will. These misfortunes which for this reason He allows, though we cannot say that He is the cause of them, seemingly attack all men almost without distinction, the innocent no less than the guilty. I say *seemingly*, for there is no doubt that apart from the ills which are common to all there are many which most often overtake the guilty and appear to be the immediate result of their fault—of drunkenness, for instance, or immorality, or theft, or pride.

Still, whether or no it can be laid at the door of its victims, misfortune has come upon them. If it is not taken with submission, if it only brings with it rebellion and protest, its whole effect does not extend beyond the sufferings which it entails; or, at most, if some redress does

follow, it seems part of a system of abstract justice in which the victim himself finds no consolation nor, it would seem, any benefit. The divine plan of atonement can only operate effectively when misfortune is met with resignation.

If the man who suffers is guilty himself, and if he takes his sufferings well, the atonement cleanses him from the stain of his sin, frees him from the debt which he had contracted to absolute justice, and raises him again to the higher life which he had lost. Evil which had its inlet by sin has its outlet by suffering.[1] Nothing better could befall him. But what outrages your feelings is to see the innocent atone for the guilty. It is here, is it not, that for you and for so many others lies the greatest stumbling-block of all ?

[1] War, plague, cholera, famine, indicate a certain ferocity in human nature which, as it had its inlet by human crime, must have its outlet by human suffering. (Emerson : *Heroism.*)

I confess that this astonishes me. Without doubt it would be childish to deny that an element of mystery hangs over the region of morals in which we are now trying to find our way. But we must not, on the other hand, deny that certain quarters of it are full of light. And I am not afraid to assert that to me the atoning value of the misfortunes of good men is one of these bright places. I can see nothing in it that is not very beautiful, very comforting, and supremely worthy of the goodness of God.

A good man overtaken by misfortune resigns himself, submits, and often his best self goes even so far as to rejoice in his trial: he wins from it immediately a rich increase in merit, in moral worth, in spiritual life, in the right to a happiness that will never end; so that, for him, the compensation is made without delay —and indeed much more than compensation; for "our present tribulation worketh

for us an eternal weight of glory."[1] Is not this a great thing already? But God in His munificence does not stop short here. Longing to pour out His mercy on the greatest possible number of men, He still cannot do so without the consent of their free will. It is then that He introduces this admirable device of solidarity by which he can reach the sinners through the innocent and accept, as available for them, the suffering gladly endured by the innocent. He will lose nothing by this, while they will gain all. Who would not have occasion to rejoice at this? The just becomes more holy; the guilty is purified; and satisfaction is made to God: His love triumphs no less than His justice. You may say: "What! does God punish the innocent for the sake of the guilty?" This is to look at the reverse side of the great fact of atonement. I turn it on to its right face and say, on the contrary:

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 17.

"God saves the guilty for the sake of the innocent."

No, it is impossible for sinners to complain of so ingenious a compassion. They will rather let their hearts be touched when they see their debt in great part discharged by the friends of the God they have insulted. They will thank them at the same time as they thank God Himself, and they will pay cheerfully and with real penitence the small balance still laid to their charge—for some assent of their own will is necessary, despite all, for their complete reinstatement.

I hope that I may have succeeded in showing to you, as I see it myself, the blessing that flows from atonement on the guilty and the innocent alike. At bottom it is for these latter that your pity is stirred, but it is a pity without understanding. You reason as if they were in some way the unwilling dupes of a revolting calculation. They are in reality the first

recipients of a kindness infinitely tender and generous. A case has occurred which made me see it all more clearly than ever at the very time when I was occupied with these meditations.

The three hours which it has taken me to jot down these thoughts as you have just read them have been distributed over four or five days, for the little time that I have to myself in our hospital is very much cut up.

One of my chief occupations in this interval, and certainly the most valued of all, was to go and see a young soldier who was slowly dying in a room by himself. He had only been in the hospital three weeks. It was obvious from the moment he arrived that he was doomed. Half of his brain was exposed, and little by little paralysis spread over his whole body. We could not, even in his lucid moments, question him much.

I only asked him what was necessary. "Where is your family?"—"In the Aisne, in the region under invasion." "I suppose you are a good Christian?"—"I communicated at Easter and after I was wounded." "Your sufferings are great, resign yourself to them."—"God's will be done." Then I knew enough. I suggested to him an act of love to God and gave him Absolution without confessing him again, and then the Blessed Sacrament. He received the sacraments with a joyous light in his eyes, usually so dim, and afterwards at each visit while I held his hand our eyes would meet in a long look. When I came the nurse would often tell me that he no longer seemed conscious of anything. I would suggest to him all the same: "My friend, let us pray: My God, I love Thee." And always he would stir from his apparent torpor long enough to repeat: "My God, I love Thee." The first day he added of his own accord after a moment's pause

this one little word which shed a ray of pure light on the depths of his silence: "My God, I love Thee—*dearly*."

The last morning, unable to speak, he made a sign of the Cross. The last evening it was enough for him to gaze at me with more affection than ever (he could no longer move even his eyes).

Each time I found him alone with a nurse in the top story of the wing that had only just been finished, where they put those whose death was long drawn out, like his. At the beginning a few distant relations, or perhaps friends, came to see him. In the last week he saw no one. What precious times we had together! I would not have exchanged them for the lessons of the greatest teachers in the world.

Atonement, it was indeed there in all its sadness and all its beauty, in the person of this gentle wounded boy of twenty, who had endured his terrible wound without

complaint and from the first had offered up all his sufferings to God, and now was passing to his death so slowly, through the long days and the longer nights, without breaking his silence except to say: "My God, I love Thee." It is through such sacrifices that the salvation of races is won and our iniquities redeemed. Verily they are legion; there are armies of them, martyrs such as he. Blessed in its misfortune is mankind when it finds refreshment and new strength in the rivers of innocent blood such as his.

But you are doubtless full of pity for him, my soldier victim, in his beautiful death? And I, too, I pitied him and wept over him when I felt his hands clench convulsively in mine with the pain; when I saw his parched lips craving for refreshment; when I felt as his breath grew steadily weaker that death had him by the throat. But at the end I saw more clearly, and he filled me with envy rather

than compassion. It was a genuine impulse which stirred me, a cry which escaped from the bottom of my heart, when I said to the nurse who was looking at us with emotion: "I would gladly be in his place."

Now, in calm deliberation, I would say so still, I would repeat it more emphatically. There is nothing so enviable as the fate of this lad. Did he not in his last agonies of suffering accomplish the cleansing of his sins and his brethren's in the blood of the Lamb of God mingled with his own? Was not death in a few moments about to break the last fetters that held him, and fling him, dazzled, into the true Light—trembling, into the great Love? Death our benefactor, death our deliverer, working our perfection, not our destruction! Thou who art the supreme victory, pardon the folly which calls thee a calamity. And praised and blessed for ever be Atonement, the greatest work of the

Love of God, which blots out all stain of evil and, not content with adding lustre to the crowns of the blessed, opens a way into heaven for the very sinners themselves.

THE REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS OF THE FUTURE LIFE

XIV

THE REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS OF THE FUTURE LIFE

The two sayings pronounced by Christ as destined to bring to an end the history of the human race sum up the essence of His teaching about the future life: "Come, ye blessed of my Father . . . Depart from me, ye cursed . . ." Union with God, separation from God—these constitute the eternal happiness and unhappiness. This is the clearest knowledge we have of the destiny which awaits us beyond the grave. It is little indeed, but it is enough to guide and sustain our efforts in the struggle between good and evil; for the rest let us put our trust in the perfect justice and loving-kindness of God.

And consider: there are people who

think that this is already too much. Some fastidious minds cannot bear to hear religion and philosophy tell men that if they pursue the good they will find it in God as their greatest happiness, but that if they pursue evil they will find it, far from God, as their greatest misery. To think, and above all to say, that virtue will be rewarded and vice punished seems to them to bring morality down to the level of a mercenary calculation. I suppose bravery is no longer bravery if it wins the *Croix d'Honneur*, and treason is no longer hateful if it involves disgrace!

And further, is it true that virtue primarily commends itself to religious souls because of its reward, and vice is primarily repugnant because of its punishment? For them, as for every one, evil is to be avoided because of its hideousness, and virtue to be sought after because of its beauty; the great reason for doing good is still that it is good; the great

reason for avoiding evil is that it is evil. But another aspect of the problem also calls for consideration: in an order of things governed and established by God, should not good and happiness, suffering and evil, in the end, coincide?

And I wonder what there is to find fault with in this? It would be strange if the consequences of their actions would be the same, if both were to die, for the pirate who gives the order to blow up a ship full of harmless passengers, and for those of the passengers who before the ship founders give up their lifebelt or their place in the boat to women and children. There are certain acts of heroism and certain sufferings which death prevents from finding their true reward in this life, and in the face of these it is impossible not to believe in some reward in a future life. And there are certain crimes, such as murder, aimed at countless numbers of people, in the face of which it

is impossible not to admit that, in so far as they are committed consciously, they must carry with them, beyond the grave, some terrible reparation.

Religion, far from bidding one act with a view to these rewards, or in fear of these punishments, declares that such motives are not enough, and that, if they are the only motives, sacramental grace must be added to them[1]; the ideal that religion sets before us as a motive is perfect charity: that is to say, the avoidance of evil through horror of evil, the pursuit of good through love of good. But religion does not think it wrong that in our moments of weakness the ideas of reward and punishment should intervene to sustain our courage and increase our chances of victory; nor that as the ship is sinking the passengers on the

[1] Further, we are taught that sacramental grace cannot purify the guilty soul whose repentance is based only on fear, and who feels no beginnings of love for God.

Titanic or the *Lusitania* who sacrificed themselves for others should rejoice in the consciousness that they were going to be united to the Supreme Good and should sing from the bottom of their hearts the words, " Nearer, my God, to Thee."

As to the nature of future rewards and punishments, neither faith nor reason, which both affirm their existence, have much to tell us; for faith and reason, both eager to strengthen our motives for action, seem both equally indifferent about what would only satisfy our curiosity.

There is one point, however, on which they shed a real ray of light and which deserves to arrest our attention. Faith teaches us, and reason rejoices to learn, that rewards and punishments in the future life are the direct results of the attitude and conduct adopted by the soul in the present life. Retribution does not come

from without; it follows from our acts themselves and from our inner nature. The essential thing in the joy or misery beyond the grave is the sense that through one's merit or through one's fault one has found or lost union with the supreme good that is God.

There is already here on earth sadness in feeling that one is wicked, and joy in feeling that one is good; every normal man has experienced remorse after an evil deed, and happiness after a good one. But this sadness and this joy are made much less intense by the imperfection of our intelligence, the disturbing influence of our passions, the distraction of external events and sights. After death it is different: freed from earthly ties, face to face with spiritual realities, the soul is fully conscious of the beauty of goodness and the happiness there is in eternal union with it; it sees the full horror of evil and the misery there is in

being sunk in it without any possibility of escape.

Heaven and hell are even now within us according as we are good or perverse, under the influence of God or slaves to the principle of evil. But we scarcely recognize this and only have a partial understanding of it. When death has torn away all veils from our sight, we shall see. If we have resisted God's grace, His commands as our omnipotent Lord, His appeals as our most tender Father; if we have used His gifts to sin against Him; if we have used our liberty to turn aside from Him, then we shall understand our terrible mistake, our criminal foolishness; then we shall suffer the consequences of our conduct just in so far as it was intentional and culpable. For having of our own free will separated ourselves from God in time, we shall still be separated from Him in eternity; and through having for ever lost this infinite Good,

we shall for ever endure suffering, also in a sense infinite. If, on the other hand, we have let God work in us, and have opened our minds to the brightness of His light, our hearts to the rays of His love; if we have submitted our wills to the commands of His wisdom and to the influence of His grace; if we have, in a word, let His life enter into us and fill us with Him now, then, dare I say it, the divine essence, the divine joy and love will come to us in their fullness, and we shall cast ourselves into them in an ecstasy which will make us for ever happy with an ineffable happiness, a happiness absolute and perfect, which we may indeed call infinite, for it will be union with the very happiness of God. Save that we shall keep our own personality, full of sweet humility and gratitude, the eternal light and blessedness will be ours as they are God's. The child, when he leaves his mother's womb, even if he could think

and feel as a grown man, would not be more dazzled at his coming into the light of the world than our souls will be when they leave their earthly shells to be plunged into the midst of the divine splendours.

GRIEF

XV

GRIEF

In the widespread mourning around us, I think that the finest spirit is shown by those who have kept their courage and their submission to God though their grief has lost none of its bitterness and though they still pass through terrible times of despair—times, however, in which the conflict ends always with the victory of the Spirit.

Christ Himself set us the same example. On the Mount of Olives, face to face with the approach of His Passion, He both accepted the cup and tried to make it pass from Him. His human will cried out in revolt; but He made it give way to that of His Father. "He began to grow sorrowful and to be sad"; but at the end He rose in His great courage to face

the trial: "Rise, let us go." And on the Cross itself, as death drew close to Him, what light is shed on the struggles going on in the depths of His human soul by that cry near to despair, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" But there, too, all ends in love and filial trust: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

We will leave out of consideration just now the poor hearts that are in revolt, or that seem to be so, for in God's sight often what we take to be a fault is only weakness or strain. Among such, then, as can stand upright beneath the crushing blows of misfortune my strongest and tenderest sympathy and admiration goes out to those whose bearing recalls most perfectly that of the Master in His agony. Such, too, does the Mother of Sorrows show herself to be in the old Christian hymn: *Stabat Mater dolorosa juxta crucem lacrymosa.* Mary stood at the foot of the

Cross on which her Son was dying: steadfastly, yes, *stabat*; but *dolorosa*, *lacrymosa*, with a face of anguish and mortal grief in her eyes, like so many poor women I have seen here whose son or husband was at the point of death; the memory of these faces ennobled by courage and marked with the lines of suffering will never fade.

Does this mean that I feel less respect for those who endure their trial stoically with a sort of fierce resolution, who do not wish to be comforted nor even to show that they are in need of comfort, hiding in the depths of their heart, as if it were a treasure or a secret for them alone, the wound which perhaps will kill them? No, indeed; before them, too, I bow in reverence. But—though I would not say it to them, for it would hurt them—I feel even more compassion for them than for the others, and I hope fervently that they will escape from this icy prison in which, driven back

upon themselves, they will soon see their activity grow less and their power of helping others become paralysed.

I asked a friend of mine the other day, a woman full of modesty and devotion, who during a long life of trial had never lost her peace of soul, though she did not refuse to shed tears over her own losses any more than over her neighbour's, what advice she would give in my place to the many unhappy women whom God sets in my path. "It is for me to consult you," she said. "But if you wish to know the rule that has helped me most, it is that which my poor dear mother gave me so many years ago now: 'When you are in sorrow, care for others.'"

To care for others, especially when they are in distress, that indeed is the great remedy for personal grief. And we shall help them all the better the more we have suffered ourselves, for above all else they long to be understood. But how can they

believe that we understand them if we are not willing to let our own sufferings be seen? If they are to confide their sorrow to us, we must not seem to be ashamed of our own: "Blessed," says the Master—and I shall venture to add to the notion of blessedness that of bringing blessings to others—"Blessed are they that mourn," not they that would consider tears a sign of weakness and almost cowardice. The heroes and saints wept—Mary wept—Jesus wept.

SUFFERERS FOR A RIGHTEOUS CAUSE

XVI

SUFFERERS FOR A RIGHTEOUS CAUSE

THERE are many to-day in the world who have need of Jesus' words of comfort: "Blessed are they that suffer for righteousness' sake." Among these sufferers for the right on whom falls the divine pity I see whole nations: the Belgian people, the first martyr of the great persecution; Poland, even more unfortunate, ravaged, laid waste, trampled under foot from one end to the other in the ebb and flow of the armies in conflict; Armenia, defenceless before atrocities in which the Turk is surpassing himself; and now Serbia, whose terrible distress is only equalled by her superhuman courage.

Side by side with these whole nations that are crushed beneath the yoke of

their enemy, or driven out of their territory, and among whom ruin, outrage, starvation, exile and murder have become part of the normal existence; side by side with these small nations, trampled under foot just because they are small, great and strong nations too, scarcely less to be pitied, see most of their noblest sons, their youngest, finest and strongest men perishing by fire and the sword, killed or maimed for life. They see mothers, wives, sisters, fiancées putting on robes of mourning; they hear the cries of countless widows and orphans ascending ceaselessly to heaven in a volume that might drown even the sound of the rifles and artillery, all the diabolical machines which fill the world with the sound of death, or rather scatter death on every side, from heaven, from beneath the sea and from the bowels of the earth.

In this chaos of miseries, in this multitude of torments which sin has let loose

upon the world, the sin of envy and covetousness, and above all the sin of pride; amid all these sufferings which the Christian world would have escaped if it had not disregarded the laws of the Gospel, I find no consolation save in the Gospel itself, and especially in the blessing promised by Christ to those who suffer for a righteous cause. But in such a conflict of ambitions and cruelties, how many are the followers after righteousness? Where are they, those who have the right to expect the kingdom of God as the reward for their misfortunes? Let us be comforted: they are everywhere; they form the great majority.

I see them first, the victims dear to God, to God's justice and His pity, in the crowds of old men, of women and children who are weeping, suffering and dying without being of any account in the terrible war, with no share in it but to be crushed by it. Next I see them in the soldiers of

the Allies who are living a life of privation and are fighting, shedding their blood and offering their lives in resistance to evil, for the triumph of liberty, for the welfare of their country and of the human race. But

let us be high-minded and Christian enough to hear such truths—I see them also, victims of duty, among our enemies themselves, in those soldiers and their families who are deceived by an intricate web of machinations and believe that they, too, are suffering for a righteous cause and sacrifice themselves for it with a courage comparable to ours. Shame and curses be on the authors of this war, in so far as they realized what they were doing!—and this is known to God alone. Mercy and recompense in eternity for the victims of the war, for all of them!

To all of them are Christ's words spoken: "Come unto me all you that labour and I will refresh you." To all of them, if they hear this divine call, if they really

come to Him in faith, in resignation, and in a great cry of prayer, to all of them His consolation comes, His radiant promise: "Rejoice when men persecute you, for your reward is very great in heaven." For them were written the mysterious words in the Apocalypse: "He that shall overcome shall thus be clothed in white garments. . . . I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out no more . . . to him I will grant to sit with me in my throne, as I also have overcome and have sat with my Father in his throne."[1]

This victory of Christ, what was it but the victory over sin, suffering and death? They, too, our countless victims, are triumphing over the same three enemies: over sin, by the atonement they are making and the pardon they win; over suffering, by bearing it though they did not deserve it; over death by accepting it with filial

[1] Apoc. iii. 5, 12, 21.

submission, or by heroically defying it. O divine victory, splendid and full of consolation, in which all will be able to share, when the very name of enemy will be blotted out. "In heaven," says St. John once more, "God shall wipe away all our tears. There will be no more mourning nor crying nor sorrow. The former things are passed away; I make all things new."[1]

[1] Apoc. xxi. 4, 5.

LUX IN TENEBRIS

XVII

LUX IN TENEBRIS

A Christmas Sermon: 1915.

"The Light shineth in darkness."—*St. John* i. 5.

It is in these words, profound and full of poetry, that the apostle St. John, at the beginning of his Gospel, sets before us the object of the great festival of Christmas and announces the Incarnation of the Word, the radiant appearance of Jesus Christ in the midst of our sombre history.

Lux in tenebris, light in the deepest darkness! If it has always been right to think of the birth of our Saviour under this striking imagery, how much more true and fitting it is at the present time! I am not only thinking, as I say this, of the material night around us, in which our hospital chapel all lit up sends out its

little rays of light, like a tiny mountain hostelry which shines a welcome to lost travellers. There is another darkness than that which drops like a veil each night upon the physical world; there is the darkness, far more dense and fearful, which can fall upon the moral world, and would hide from our sight all good, all justice, and all truth. St. John's words apply equally to both these kinds of darkness; in the one, as in the other, the soft light of Bethlehem appears to drive the gloom away.

I

In the beautiful story of the Nativity in the Gospels great stress is laid on the fact that it was night. The worshippers whom we are shown prostrate before the Divine Child are first the shepherds who were keeping the night watches beside their flocks when the Angels came to them with good tidings in the heavenly bright-

ness and glory of God ; and then the Magi who came from the East, following a new star, and knew that they had reached their journey's end when they saw their mysterious guide standing over a hamlet in the mountains of Judah.

And to-day, after nineteen hundred years, while the daily evolution of the heavens brings the sacred hour of midnight to all the different regions of the earth in their turn, lights are kindled amid the darkness in the windows of all the churches, and in the hearts of men, in harmony with the glittering stars on high. Everywhere still, as at Bethlehem, lies a calm and deep obscurity, yet in the silence celestial hymns are heard, and the darkness is lit by heavenly light. *Lux in tenebris.*

But it is you, soldiers of the great War, who have known the most moving of the dark yet radiant Christmas Eves, and you have often told us of it. I wish I could now let you speak in my place and your-

selves tell again to this gathering of friends what Christmas was for you last year; what it is now, whenever there is a breathing space in the struggle, for your companions in suffering and glory. On more than one section of the front fighting was going on, you told us; and the only light which pierced the gloom was that of the rockets, the explosion of shells or bombs, the burning of what was left of a wood or a village. But often, too, there was a tacit truce established between the hostile lines that lay so close together; German chorales answered the Noëls of France and England—*O Tannenbaum* alternated with our *Minuit, Chrétiens* and Christmas carols; and in many of our trenches and dug-outs there were scenes reminiscent of the catacombs—chaplains and soldier-priests celebrating the midnight Mass on a plank or a hollow in the wall by the light of two lanterns: rude but sublime altars, more worthy

perhaps than had ever been seen before of the Cradle of Bethlehem and the Cross of Calvary! When at the moment of the Consecration the God of peace and goodwill deigned to come down to these lowly and dangerous sanctuaries, was it not in truth like a ray of sun penetrating the depth of a dungeon, or a heavenly light blazing out in the midst of black darkness? Here once more, *lux in tenebris.*

II

But what is material night compared to the night of the soul? And how much more sombre and full of anguish is this than the other! Was it ever as deep as now, this darkness in which mankind is groping about in the search for a way of escape from its anxieties, its sufferings, its ignorance, and all the evils that beset it; this darkness in which our reason struggles powerless, and our poor heart fails us; this darkness in which Jesus

Christ alone, God made Man, can bring real help and true light?

I do not wish to draw again the picture of the miseries of the present time; wounded, nurses, doctors, you know them too well; for a year and a half you have borne them yourselves or have helped others who were bearing them. I will only bring one aspect of them before you, but it is the aspect in which all the others are summed up: that is the very fact that there are so many evils; the agonizing problem which arises like a black cloud out of this abyss of calamities; the temptation which might come to us, which does come to many, to reproach God with them. "If we have in heaven a Father Who is all good and all powerful, why is there suffering and sin and death? Why in this cruel time is there so much pain, so much wickedness, why so many massacres? Why is there war, and why this war?"

It is a terrible darkness, my friends, I

know it—a darkness that not reason nor even faith know how to drive away utterly. But both can let some real light in upon it, and we have more than once tried together to find some of this brightness. For instance, there is the splendour of moral good and the impossibility that it can be realized if we are not free also to do evil; there is, again, the fatal bond between sin and suffering; and finally, there are the noble consequences that may follow from our bitterest sorrows. We will not go over again, even in outline, these arguments which the philosopher and the theologian rightly bring before perplexed minds. But there is another answer which I am anxious to recall to you because, since it is drawn from the very fact of the Incarnation, it is connected very naturally with our festival of Christmas. It is the answer of the heart of God to the heart of man; and like everything which comes from one heart to another, it is simple

and strong; you will, I trust, find it full of real consolation and indeed convincing.

Would we reproach God, Who forbids sin, with our miseries, due to sin alone; would we conclude from the sufferings which we endure that God is not good, that He is hard and does not love us? Do you know how God will justify Himself? Since in His wisdom He cannot destroy our free will, nor in His righteousness destroy the suffering which follows its misuse, He will Himself share in our sorrows and will become Man that He may suffer with us!

Remember, Christians, your profession of faith, that we will make in a moment when we say together the Creed of the Mass: "I believe in Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Who for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate and was made Man." *Et homo factus est.*—That is our Christmas joy! He was made man for us, submitting at the same moment to all the weaknesses,

sorrows and humiliations which are the common lot of men. But that was not enough for Him: *Crucifixus etiam pro nobis, passus et sepultus est.* The anguish of the Cross, death, burial, that was His purpose, that was what He suffered, and always for us. . . .

Now deny the goodness of God! "God so loved the world," wrote St. John in wonder, "as to give His only-begotten Son"! God so loves men that to come near to them, to draw them near to Him, He Himself becomes Man and lets us see Him as a little Child in the arms of a young mother; God so loves men that, seeing them condemned through their fault to suffer and being unable Himself to suffer in His Divinity, He takes their human nature upon Him, and to console and encourage them as well as to atone for their faults He sets Himself to suffer like them, to suffer more than them, thinking that thus He would have more chance to make Himself

loved by them: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth," He said, "shall draw all men unto me" . . . "As the Father has loved me, I also have loved you". . . "Come to me, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you."

And those who labour go to Him indeed; they let themselves be drawn by Him. And it is no longer submission alone and resignation that, lifted up on the Cross, He wins from them; it is, at least in the most generous souls, a supernatural joy, a passion of love which goes beyond and confounds the reason of sages: "I fill up those things that are wanting in the sufferings of Christ in my body," wrote St. Paul; "I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation."

And it will be so throughout the history of the Church: St. Theresa will ask "either suffering or death," while her master St. John of the Cross will long for nothing so much as "to suffer and be

despised"; Francis Xavier in his sufferings will cry out, "Yet more, Lord, yet more"! And Magdalene of Pazzi will ask "never to die so as always to suffer"!

Of this strange wish for suffering, this burning folly of the Cross, our Lord Himself gave us an example: "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you,"[1] He says to His Apostles when, after thirty-three years of waiting, He sees the hour of His sacrifice draw near. And a little earlier: "I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized: and how am I straightened until it be accomplished."[2] Is it astonishing that His disciples follow Him and that, loving them with this overflowing love, He in return should be deeply beloved by them? Is there, to use His words, any greater proof of love than to lay down one's life for one's friends? Assuredly not! And you know this well, you who have faced death for the sake of your

[1] Luke xxii. 15. [2] Luke xii. 50.

country and your home. Jesus knows it also, and that is why He died for our salvation. We know it as well, and that is why we are sure of His love for us: "And we have known and have believed the charity which God hath to us."[1]

No, Divine Child of Bethlehem, no, Divine Victim of the Cross, we are no longer tempted to doubt Thy love. However overwhelming may seem the evils beneath which the world is groaning today, and whatever the mystery which still surrounds the problem of human suffering, our heart is not troubled nor our faith shaken. For Thy love is there to cheer us, to warm us, to enlighten us, and the wickedness and madness of men do not shed darkness so widely as Thy Cradle and Thy Cross shed light. *Lux in tenebris!*

[1] 1 St. John iv. 16.

THE BLESSINGS OF SUFFERING

XVIII

THE BLESSINGS OF SUFFERING

THERE are many whose faith is disturbed by the ever-recurring problem of evil, heightened as it is now by the terrible spectacle presented by the present war. I have already tried to show them that evil in general, and this war in particular, far from being attributable to God, are, on the contrary, the result of revolt against God and transgression of His laws by the free will of man. Since all evils, war as well as every other, come from sin, how, we asked, can we attribute them to God Who forbids sin? And we believe honestly that reason, if it considers this aspect of the problem, can here find an answer to its difficulties.

Would it not be possible to pursue this line of thought even farther, and show

that God not only is not Himself the author of evil but is at work to repair its melancholy consequences, and to enable us to extract real good from the sufferings which it involves? This would indeed comfort our hearts.

It has often been said that this war, through the very sufferings that it entails and in spite of its cruelty, brings a precious leaven of regeneration into many souls. If it were possible to publish them, I could give many instances which would clearly demonstrate this from what I have seen in the life of the hospital. But I would rather dwell on a well-known example, the striking case of Rupert Brooke, an English poet of twenty-three, who died at Lemnos while on active service.

A friend sent me yesterday the *ultima verba* of this young writer, five beautiful sonnets. She wrote—and she is a very good judge—"He belonged until lately

to the most modern school of our young poets; their tone was self-indulgent, cynical, distinctly non-moral, and quite anti-Christian. But when war broke out Rupert Brooke was one of the first to volunteer. These five sonnets which I am sending you will show you the new spirit which was awakened in him by this act of self-sacrifice."

What will a man like this say about suffering, which he has always looked upon as the worst enemy; and about the war, in which, after terrible hardships, he was to meet his death? He will actually welcome these hard trials as the messengers of divine kindness, and he will not know how to thank Heaven enough for having made him share in them! His feelings can be judged by the first sonnet, whose title alone, "*Peace*," is in itself a revelation—

"Now God be thanked, Who has matched us with
His hour,

And caught our youth, and wakened us from
sleeping."

The second sonnet, "*Safety*," sings of the security of the warrior

"Secretly armed against all death's endeavour:
Safe though all safety's lost; safe where men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all."

The third sonnet, "*The Dead*," reveals still more fully the new and glorious light which the great ordeal had shed upon his soul—

"Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!
There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,
But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold."

The fourth sonnet has again the title "*The Dead*," and the fifth "*The Soldier*." Under new imagery, the inspiration is the same. From the first line to the last there shines out, illuminated by the surrender of his life, the magnificent assertion of the joys of sacrifice.

He has expressed, but with greater right

to do so, the same idea as that of a French poet, who, however, had not the blessing of working his own redemption: "Blessed art Thou, O my God, Who givest us suffering as the divine cure for our impurities, as the best and purest essence to prepare strong souls for the joys of heaven."[1]

I do not think I am exaggerating at all if I say that the great Beatitudes which have been reflected from century to century in the words and lives of the saints, find a true echo in the verses of this young soldier. Who could refuse to listen to him? They are suffering, fighting and dying for us, all these heroes who in word and deed testify, like Jesus, that it is good to endure hardships for the sake of truth and righteousness; that the true

[1] Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal.*
Soyez béni, mon Dieu, qui donnez la souffrance
Comme un divin remède à nos impuretés,
Et comme la meilleure et la plus pure essence
Qui prépare les forts aux saintes voluptés!

riches lie in renouncing all; that the great conquest is to deny oneself, the supreme victory to take up one's cross and give up one's *life*.

"Blessed are they that mourn, blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek, blessed are they that suffer persecution," repeated the disciples of Jesus Christ. And the world protested: "This doctrine is aimed at turning our efforts away from earth and the blessings of the present which we can attain, towards heaven and the future blessings which do not depend upon us. Let us resist it in the name of our own happiness; to relegate it thus to the future is to banish it from the present."

The world protested because it did not understand, because it was not worthy to understand. It is true that Jesus Christ does show us that beyond the grave the injustices of this earth are set right, whole-hearted self-denial is rewarded, and undeserved misfortunes and the sufferings

that men have imposed on themselves or endured cheerfully for the good of their brothers bring their consolation; and I ask what good it would serve if this hope was taken away from men in their many trials? But let there be no mistake: the Kingdom of Heaven which is promised is not opened to them only after death; from this very moment they are allowed to cross its threshold and taste its first splendours. "There is something called Beatitude which is the companion of trials and sufferings; it does not follow after them, it accompanies them. It is not when poverty, sorrows, hunger, thirst and persecutions are over, but in the midst of sufferings and trials, that something should enter into the heart of man, that a higher feeling of life and of true happiness should come to dwell there. This feeling of happiness is Beatitude."[1]

[1] Hoskier, *Ne jamais désespérer*, p. 91 (Paris: Delagrave).

We are not here talking of a material happiness which can be carried with us into the future life—the Bible is not the Koran. We are talking about a spiritual happiness which can be enjoyed already here on earth. For the pure in heart, for unselfish souls, for the peacemakers, the meek, the patient and the merciful, God has created joys infinitely higher than those which are given by pleasure, wealth, and power. And if it is not His will that these pure sources of happiness should be exhausted, like the others, in a few hours and a few short days ; if, according to His saying, He has made them flow on into the life eternal, none the less does He disclose them to all men of good will in this present life and, even on the earth, offer refreshment to those that hunger and thirst after righteousness.

The hidden sweetness that flows from the sufferings we submit to should arise

chiefly from the fact that they turn our thoughts more to God and make us more alive to our own weakness, to the worthlessness of human things, and to our need of help from above.

"When He slew them they sought Him and turned them early and inquired after God." [1]

It is in the hour of affliction that the divine summons becomes more urgent and more tender: "Come to me, all you that labour and are heavy laden and I will refresh you." And at the same time as He is calling us we feel that He is coming to us; it is a beautiful intuition of the language of mysticism, to call a trial the visitation of God.

In the Redemption this drawing together of the soul and God in the mystery of suffering takes a still deeper and more exact meaning. To suffer as one should

[1] Psalm lxxvii. 34 (Vulgate).

is to be united to the crucified Jesus—to be, as St. Paul says, crucified with Him[1]; it is to take the means to draw near to Him which He Himself clearly appointed for us when He said: "Whosoever will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me." To suffer with God is, for those who love Him and wish to please Him, the greatest happiness, and the experience of every soul confirms the promise Jesus Christ made to His disciples: "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy."

The experience of every soul—I do not say only the experience of the saints whom we see so enamoured of the cross and of suffering that they can no longer be content without it, but continually beseech God for it as the greatest of all favours; I am speaking of the experience of ordinary folk like ourselves, like the people we meet around us. Among the several thousands

[1] "With Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Galatians ii. 19).

of patients with whom I have had to do at our hospital I can say, without being indiscreet, that I have scarcely met any who seem to have gained nothing from their sufferings. Almost all were purified and made gentler and more refined, even humanly speaking, through suffering. In the souls of most of them could be seen the effective working of God; prayer, faith, love for the heavenly Father, and trust in the protection of the Virgin Mother blossomed anew; and in those who were already good Christians there was a revival of fervour, a joy, a tenderness towards God which often in the warmth and overflow of emotions went out also to the priest, the instrument of His grace, and made me feel almost ashamed.

It would be a mistake to attribute this renewal of life, this development of the religious sense, to the thought of death, to the disquieting approach of the mysteries behind the veil. No, the experience of

which I am speaking—the growth of religious life under the influence of pain—took place generally in circumstances when there was absolutely no risk of death; and in cases where there was this risk the patient as a rule had no suspicion of it. It was indeed pain alone which carried out its wonderful work and moulded the souls of men in so divine a fashion. As for those few who consciously found themselves face to face with death and submitted themselves to it, I bow in reverence before their memory, and I will only say that if any one doubts the sublime effects of pain it is because he has never seen a Christian die.

But why should pain, so long as it is accepted, thus draw us near to God? The first reason is, I think, that it atones for our sins—that it destroys the evil in us, either at the roots, if they are still there, or by removing the sad traces it has left

just as a clever use of surgery gets rid of the causes of the disease and the beginnings of the infection it was spreading.

We have all sinned, and, as St. John says in his first Epistle, "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves," our soul is too lacking in sensibility to be aware of its true wretchedness. Paralysed men are like that; they have not enough vitality to know how ill they are, they are slowly dying without realizing it. Now sin brings remorse, the assertion of God's laws, and alarm and fear at having transgressed them. Who will comfort us? Sin makes us debtors to infinite righteousness. Who will set us free? Sin robs our souls of their purity, their brightness and their beauty. Who will restore it? Sin saps our strength, weakens us, and seems sometimes to destroy our spiritual and even our physical force. Who will heal us and give us fresh life? Jesus the Redeemer. Yes, we believe it, and know

that in Him alone is salvation. But we know also that the fruits of His sacrifice cannot be applied to us without co-operation on our part, and that purifying grace does not act on a free being as automatically as rain on parched earth. To endure suffering willingly and with resignation is to lay our soul open to all the effects of Christ's Passion,[1] to work our purification, to do away with every remaining barrier between God and us, to restore life where before there was death ; it is like the triumphant assurance, after despair at the loss of one's beloved that one will meet him once more.

Here in its fullness is revealed the Christian answer to the problem of evil. It does not consist in a logical explanation. No theory, however ingenious, could ever do away with the existence of evil ; and even, to suppose the impossible, if evil

[1] " I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ " (Col. ii. 24).

could be proved to be nothing, this much of evil would still remain, the error that believed in its existence. But away with these subtleties! The existence of evil is only too certain and our speculations cannot affect it. The true solution of the problem is practical. In the presence of actual evil, as in the presence of certain physical diseases, there is nothing to be done but to reabsorb it and change it into good. And this is the work of atonement, of the Redemption, which through suffering joined with repentance destroys in us the roots of evil, does away with its disastrous consequences, and even reaps from it those admirable results, humility and gratitude, so that love grows with pardon, and that there is more joy in heaven over the repentance of one sinner than over the perseverance of many righteous men. And because this reparation would have been too much for human powers—for sin being an offence against

God has something of infinity—God Himself, in the person of His Son Jesus, took its burden upon Him; He suffers our acts of atonement, powerless by themselves, to be added to His, and to become by this very union a match for the evil which has to be overthrown.

Many are the aspects under which this war pierces like a sharp sword into the recesses of moral life; its redemptive aspect must not be passed over in silence. Pride, obstinacy, sensuality; there was indeed evil in the world—it was steeped in it. If we could look at things with God's eyes we might see in this moral degradation, the deep-seated cause of the war, something more terrible than the war itself. Who knows whether, taken as a whole, it is not better that instead of continuing its secret ravages in the social organism, evil should have broken out and shown what it really was, with all the horror of its natural consequences? On our

generation lies the task, overwhelming indeed, but glorious and full of merit, of reabsorbing the evil, redeeming it, atoning for it. This is why some are dying and others suffer through their deaths, while all, if they take their share of sorrow with resignation, contribute to the common salvation.

This we must not fear to assert; and, moreover, if it is understood aright it is more likely to raise men's courage than to annoy them. Let us, however, in speaking of atonement, avoid attributing the faults which call for it entirely to our political opponents within the nation, or to our foreign enemies. Not only must we not be like the Pharisee in the Gospel who boasted that he did not share the vices of "this publican"; a publican who boasted that he was without the pride of "this Pharisee" would be no better. Let us offer up our sufferings on behalf of all men, but let us think first of atonement for our personal

sins. One priest alone, Jesus Christ, was able in His sacrifice to think only of the sins of others.[1]

Suffering not only destroys the evil in us, but also develops the good, and the development that it brings about is no less precious than the purification. Any one who fails to think of this or to bring it to the notice of others deprives himself or those whom he wishes to help of a great means, and perhaps the most effective, of encouragement and consolation.

In the first place suffering seems to be necessary before the intellect can come to its maturity. "Man is an apprentice; suffering is his master, and no one

[1] "For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, . . . who needeth not daily, as other priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the people's" (Heb. vii. 26, 27).

knows himself till he has suffered."[1] Those who have passed through this great school can compare the outlook upon things that they have learnt there with the vain assurances and illusions of prosperity. How many individuals and how many nations are there who have not been intoxicated by power, riches, and uninterrupted success? Let trials come and the delusion vanishes. Man discovers the seriousness of his destiny, the fleeting nature of earthly blessings and misfortunes, the nothingness of all that is mortal. Nations find out their deficiencies; Germany sees that she is not supreme in the world, that she has understood nothing of the strength of moral forces, that she has brought upon herself by her pride, her pretensions and

[1] "L'homme est un apprenti; la douleur est son maître
Et nul ne se connaît, tant qu'il n'a pas souffert."

ALFRED DE MUSSET.

her cruelty the hatred of the human race; France confesses that "if she had had twenty million more inhabitants and half as many sellers of intoxicants it is probable that she would have been spared this bloody ordeal."[1]

And while suffering enlightens the mind it gives the will gentleness and power.

One is little inclined, as a rule, to look on suffering as a source of energy. It is so, none the less, and the greatest command of oneself consists in bearing suffering well: "In your patience you shall possess your souls."[2] Illness itself, which impairs our physical force, is the occasion of all others for the exercise of moral force. The effort required for taking any action or for fighting is much less than that

[1] From a speech by Paul Deschamel, President of the Chamber of Deputies, reported in the *Temps*, Jan. 4, 1916.

[2] St. Luke xxi. 19.

needed to submit to long periods of enforced rest, to the loss of a limb, to the deprivation of sight. To bear one's trials with patience is to deny oneself, to get out of oneself, to make one's happiness depend on that of God, or of one's neighbour. The soul who has attained to this has nothing more to fear; it is lord of itself and has the mastery of circumstances.

One great thing about this strength that springs from suffering is that there is no risk of its appearing hard, like the strength of those who are well and happy. He who suffers is generally conscious of his needs and is ready to be humble; and the humble, caring nothing for themselves, are tender towards others. Pride of life, on the other hand, which is born of success, prosperity and good health, inclines a man to look on his neighbour as a step by which to raise himself. "Most of us would keep our souls closed to others unless we had suffered; trial breaks our

souls down and forces them to pour out streams of love around them."[1]

And, further, how can we sympathize with the sufferings of others if we do not know what suffering is? Grief is an experience of the soul; whatever its symptoms or expressions, we can only discern it in others by conjecture, and it is impossible to conjecture it if we have no experience of it. That is why God sends more sufferings to form the souls of those who are to be bearers of consolation to many others. St. Paul, for instance, called to the most fruitful ministry, had therefore to pass through all the more trials: "I will show him how great things he must suffer for the sake of my name."[2] And he himself said the same of his Master: "In that wherein he himself hath suffered and been tempted he is able to succour

[1] H. Perreyve, *Méditations sur le Chemin de la croix*, p. 91.

[2] Acts ix. 15–16.

them also that are tempted. For we have not a high priest that cannot have compassion on our infirmities; but one tempted in all things like as we are, yet without sin."[1]

Kinder towards others, he whose soul suffers, by a tender law of Providence, sees the good that he does to them return upon himself. The pains that he in his powerlessness takes to relieve them set his own energies in motion once more; the effort to enter into their cares and to soothe them makes him forget his own; the good tidings that in his anguish he brings to comfort them, restore his own tranquillity. And this is often only the first step in a glorious ascent. Freed from the burden of selfishness the soul mounts more quickly to the heights. His best powers gradually are set free, grow greater and attain to heroism.

[1] Hebrews ii. 18 and iv. 15

I do not know if in theory heroism can be shown in times of prosperity; as a matter of fact, all the instances of it that are quoted are the fruit of a period of suffering, of self-sacrifice and of trouble. Heroism cannot usually be shown without serious risk of life, and it often involves death. But what does it matter if one instant of sublime suffering can work more progress than half a century of commonplace effort? The greatest life is not the longest or most enjoyable, but the most intense, the richest, and the deepest. Such a life does not dwell in the house of laughter.[1] Rather

[1] A few years ago Henry du Roure, one of the most interesting victims of this war, wrote hailing "the revival of heroism" in his *Chroniques françaises et chrétiennes*: "To get out of oneself, to forget oneself, no longer to carry the heavy burden of one's personality, to let oneself be carried away by something stronger, to trust oneself to the tide, to suffer but to thrill with life, to die but to have lived! This is a dream so fair that there is none more compelling on the earth, that indeed it is the only dream. All others arise from it.

happy is the soldier—and they are legion—who dies to-day to save for those he loves, for his country and for mankind, the treasure of a free and noble life! Happy is the nurse (she belonged to our hospital) who, when she knew that it was necessary for doctors, if they were to combat the virus of gangrene caused by poisonous gas with greater success, to study its evolution in a healthy organism, inoculated herself secretly with the terrible poison and said to them, "Now study it."

Everything that is great is born in sorrow, and we reverence sorrow for this fruitfulness. "A woman when she is in labour hath sorrow because her hour is

Whither does the effort of the mystics tend but to the loss of self, the annihilation of self in the flood of divine love? This is the law of individuals and nations alike. Thus are great passions born that sway the masses, frenzies of love which force millions on to their knees before a master, frenzies of glory and self-sacrifice which drive a whole nation to its frontiers."

come," said our Lord; "but when she hath brought forth the child, she remembereth no more the anguish for the joy that a man is born into the world."[1] And St. Paul shows us "every creature groaning and in labour"[2] full of the hope of a new world more beautiful and more divine.

Individuals or nations, never have people suffered so much as at this time in which we are living; nor have the souls of men ever striven so hard for ideals, for a purer and more generous life. Never has human society broken so energetically with the selfish and cowardly passions which bound it down to the pursuit of material well-being and shut from its eyes all vistas of moral progress. Let us not lose trust though the tempest rage. It is driving away the clouds that are oppressing us, and God's sun will appear once more over the horizon.

[1] St. John xvi. 21.
[2] Romans viii. 18–23.

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